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PRIVATE EYE

THE QUEEN AT 80

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MA'AM!

Model shown RX 400h with metallic paint £36,900 OTR. RX range prices start from £36,350 to £45,765. Prices correct at time of going to press and include VAT, delivery charges, number plates, full tank of fuel, one year's road fund licence and first registration fee. BBC Top Gear Magazine Motoring Survey

RX 400h fuel economy figures: extra-urban 37.2mpg (7.6L/100km), urban 31.0mpg (9.1L/100km), combined 34.9mpg (8.1L/100km). CO_2 emissions 192g/km.

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Follow the World Cup with the Eye's crack team of experts who will cover all the action in depth as it happens

Sally Jockstrap The award-winning sports writer will be in Sri Lanka to tell us that Ian Woosnam is on course for his third grand slam.

Brian Sewell Brings his critical eye to bear on the aesthetic spectacle in Germany, "My dear, those frightful Costa Rican shirts – how vulgar".

Melanie Phillips Takes a moral line on the cup and asks, "What is the conspiracy that keeps Israel out of Germany? It's Nuremberg all over again".

Mike Standup Perrier Award-winning comic gives his unique humorous take on World Cup madness, "That Peter Crouch, they call him Crouch, but really he should be called Peter Tall".

Boris Johnson Keeps an eye on the footballers' wives and girlfriends. "Cripes!"

Bill Deedes Takes the historical view, "I saw the First World Cup in 1878 when Prussia beat the Ottoman Empire in a penalty shoot-out."

Yes, they're all writing exclusively for Private Eye.
If it's football, it's in the Eye! And if it's in the Eye, it must be football!

"Oh no – there's an intruder in the cake"

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ABC

Always first to score

■ **An own goal for Nike: Ad Nauseam** 10
■ **In the box but off the pace: Eye TV** 10
■ **Footie 'n' mouth disease** 11
■ **Jonathan Aitken's heroic Diary** 25
■ **Torture, Asbos, Charity News & more: In the Back** 28, 29

THE Queen's birthday honours show yet again what activities Prime Minister Tony Blair finds most honourable in public life.

Services to tax-dodging

Retail tycoon **Philip Green's** scheme to channel money from his Arcadia empire to his wife in Monaco, escaping hundreds of millions in tax, continues to charm the establishment. Not only was he given privileged access to the boardroom of HM Revenue and Customs shortly after paying his wife £1.2bn (see *Eye* 1136), but he can now add a knighthood to his fortune.

And all has been forgiven, it seems, with the CBE for leading bean-counter **Peter Wyman**. Six years ago as a PwC partner he led a campaign against a tax clampdown, prompting Gordon Brown to rubbish him as "the adviser to Neil Hamilton when he was at the DTI". Wyman has since devoted himself to campaigning for the big accountancy firms' liabilities for dodgy audits to be limited.

Services to obesity

Despite Britain's "obesity crisis", Labour has given a knighthood to **John Sunderland**, chairman of Cadbury Schweppes. The Department of Health may want to ban confectionary and junk food ads on TV before the watershed, but Blair and Culture Minister Tessa Jowell aren't keen. The gong suggests who will win the battle.

Sunderland is a militant when it comes to advertising to kids. Last year he told the Society of British Advertisers that "the threat to freedom of advertising is greater than I can remember", while rejecting any link between advertising his products and obesity. "Jingles and slogans – often mocked by the self-appointed guardians of language – have helped millions of young children to speak and read."

Services to banking rip-offs

Hats off to **James Crosby**, chief executive of HBOS (Halifax-Bank of Scotland) who was knighted, and to HSBC finance director **Douglas Flint**, who got a CBE. Crosby's gong may reflect his bank's enthusiasm for New Labour PFIs, several of which it funds. It has also made huge profits of course – not least by encouraging charges for cash machines. Too bad that two years ago HBOS was fined £1.25m for not having proper anti-money laundering procedures, and in March it had a VAT-dodging scam overruled by the European Court as "an abusive practice".

Flint's HSBC was recently fined £100,000 for giving inaccurate reports to the Financial Services Authority – and the Department of Transport's investigation into claims that it has been rigging the market in leasing rolling stock to train companies remains ongoing. HSBC has made big profits too, of course, with a handy sideline in "sub prime" lending – an industry term for charging huge interest to poor borrowers. It has two brands aimed at the poor: HFC Bank in the Britain and the heavily criticised Household International arm in the United States. In a hint of a forthcoming debt crisis, HSBC recently doubled its provision for bad debts to £622m.

Services to radiation leaks

Blair's nuclear feelings were revealed in the CBE to BNFL chairman **Gordon Campbell**, who was put on the board in 2000 to try to strengthen the firm after a scandal about fake test results from Sellafield. Alas, Campbell has done little to halt further crises: the massive leak at the Thorp plant, which was undiscovered for months, occurred on his watch. Despite the failings, Campbell – a director of split capital trust misseller Jupiter asset management to boot – was allowed to leak Blair's plans for a new set of nuclear power stations before the last election.

Services to Rotten Boroughs

There was much hilarity in Flintshire over the OBE for former county council leader, and the *Eye*'s old chum, **Alex Aldridge**, for services to local government in Wales. Readers will recall how Cllr Aldridge once received quite a few services *from* council employees... in the form of security lighting, electrical works, Artexing of ceilings and the installation of a boiler.

A MERE three years after the event, Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett has belatedly been forced to admit that American billionaire Riley Bechtel was secretly given a CBE in 2003 by her predecessor, Jack Straw.

Why the furtiveness? Beckett explains that "awards to citizens where Her Majesty the Queen is not head of state are not formally announced".

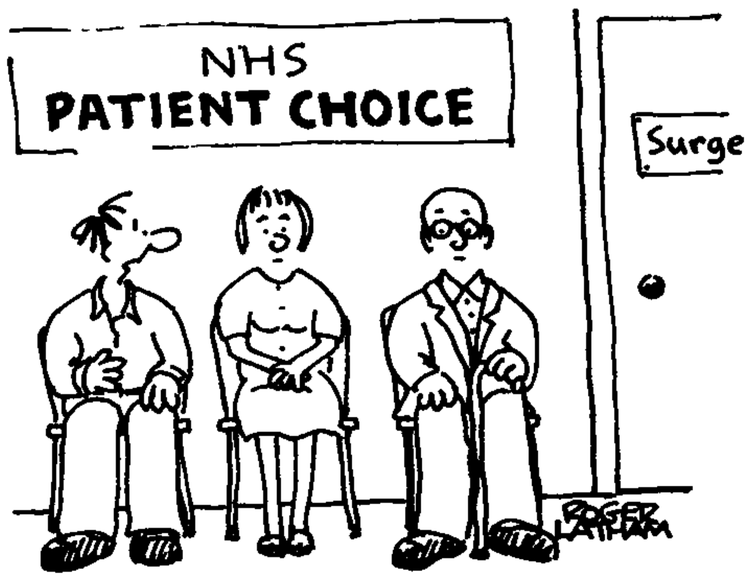
This is disingenuous drivel. Two years ago the Foreign Office announced its honorary knighthood for Bill Gates in a long press release, embellished with a gushing tribute from Straw. Nor was it so coy about many other honours for foreigners – from the knighthood for the *Indie*'s Irish owner Tony O'Reilly to the MBE for footballer Gianfranco Zola.

A likelier explanation for the official bashfulness is that Bechtel's company has gained much notoriety for its lucrative contracts in post-war Iraq – and its well-placed friends in Washington, many of whom are former Bechtel directors. Embarrassed by any mention of the dread words "Iraq" and "dollars", British ministers decided to keep schtum.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Heather vehemently denies the allegations in the *News of the World* printed on Sunday which are untrue and highly defamatory. She is able to commence legal proceedings in relation to these vicious slurs against her reputation... She will defer issue of legal proceedings until the arrangements in relation to the divorce are concluded but intends to sue at that stage all parties." – *Heather Mills on stories that she used to be a prostitute, 13 June*

"It's total rubbish. Paul and I are very much together. We will 100 percent sue on this because it is total rubbish. I can't wait to sue because I will make a fortune for my charity." – *Heather Mills on stories that she was to separate from Paul McCartney, 7 May*



"I hope we're chosen"

FOOTBALL NEWS

THE men running international football were none too amused at having their World Cup party spoilt by the BBC's *Panorama* programme, *The Beautiful Bung*, in which reporter Andrew Jennings door-stepped FIFA president Sepp Blatter and other luminaries with some awkward questions about bribery and profiteering from FIFA contracts.

Responses varied from "I don't answer these questions" (Blatter) to "go fuck yourself" (FIFA vice-president Jack Warner).

Jennings explained how Swiss company ISL had sustained its lucrative monopoly on the World Cup marketing rights for 20 years with backhanders for influential FIFA apparatchiks. He concluded his exposé with news that the Swiss authorities were investigating allegations that FIFA had illegally repaid some of the bribes to the liquidators of ISL after the company went bust in 2001 following a series of business blunders – in the process protecting the identities (and quite possibly the bank balances) of the lucky recipients of the bungs.

Straight after the broadcast FIFA issued a strongly-worded denial: "It is completely false and defamatory to claim that either the FIFA president or FIFA are the subject of a bribery probe". But "bribery probe" or not, the *Eye* has seen documents from a court in Liechtenstein that prove that FIFA *is* the subject of what the judge described as "criminal proceedings" by the Swiss courts to determine "whether the payment of FIFA was lawful or not".

Like many dubious outfits FIFA (slogan "For the Good of the Game") is keen to present a squeaky clean image. Two days before the World Cup kicked off, it set up an ethics committee in response to rampant corruption in the game.

CAMERON OPENS HIS HEART

Street Of Shame

FOLLOWING the precedent they established at the Athens Olympics in 2004, when Denis Campbell was arrested while trying to get into the athletics stadium at the dead of night and Jamie Jackson got lost after going for a walk round the block of the staff apartment, *Observer* sports hacks have again distinguished themselves with their off-field exploits at this year's World Cup.

Special mention goes to *Observer Sport Monthly* editor Jason Cowley who, in his very first game at the tournament, did his bit for Anglo-German relations by calling press stewards, with whom he was enjoying a heated debate, "money-grabbing bastards".

Enter the German police who dragged Cowley away and held him in a quiet room until he had calmed down and was safe to be let back into civilised society. Sadly, his subsequent match report included no description of this far more intriguing encounter.

Denis Campbell, meanwhile, maintained his form by missing his flight out.

THE *News of the World* has adopted a zero tolerance policy when it comes to English football louts stirring up drunken violence in Germany.

On 28 May it named and shamed a ring of yobs intent on causing trouble: "They passed around cannabis joints and swigged whisky as they told our undercover reporter of their World Cup plans – and bragged of past battles… we stopped their plans for travelling to Germany dead by handing a dossier of evidence to the police."

But the *Screws*'s antipathy towards known thugs doesn't seem to influence its own recruitment policy. Reporting from Germany as the paper's football correspondent is one Rob Shepherd. In January 2004, Shepherd was sentenced to 14 months in jail after savagely attacking a man in a south London wine bar while tired and emotional.

WITH a string of awards for its foreign correspondents, it's a wonder the *Sunset Times* foreign desk is so careless about looking after its hacks.

Marie Colvin lost an eye in 2001 covering a story in Sri Lanka and at least three more journos have ended up in the Priory since then, traumatised by the pressure of their dangerous work.

Christina Lamb, the gong winning war correspondent now in Afghanistan, worked for weeks trying to break a story in Helmand province. A nervous Ministry of Defence firmly blocked her efforts and warned all its military press officers not to co-operate with her under any circumstances.

Nevertheless, a day later at Kabul's chi-chi French restaurant l'Atmosphere, hacks were horrified to hear Lamb enduring a heated phone conversation with her foreign desk, as someone demanded that she hire a car and drive down to Helmand anyway. What with Taliban gunmen, roadside bombs and airstrikes, the journey would have been suicidal as well as pointless.

"Surely you can get information on the road ahead," a voice insisted. From the Taliban RAC, presumably.

ALSO spotted in Kabul, schmoozing with hacks, was Paul Hamill, a member of the Foreign Office Coalition Information Centre.

He was tasked back in 2003 with helping Alastair Campbell compile the "dodgy dossier" about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. His thoughts on the situation in Afghanistan are eagerly anticipated.

NO newspaper has been more critical of the auction of some of Princess Margaret's bric-a-brac than the *Daily Mail*.

Ancient showbiz hack Michael Thornton was wheeled out to attack Lord Linley, Margaret's son. In her new Saturday column Amanda Platell wrote about Linley with a level of vitriol even Glenda Slagg might have struggled to match. But the *Mail* did not let the matter rest there, devoting leader space and another spread to the story.

One can only admire the courage of *Mail* editor Paul Dacre in running such material, for he presumably knows – at least we hope he does – that Linley is a good acquaintance of the *Mail*'s proprietor Lord Rothermere, his wife, and their circle of smart friends.

THE *Daily Mail* was deeply distressed at the news that civil servant Tracey Temple continues to claim her £30,000 salary, despite the fact that she has been on gardening leave – or as the paper put it, "sunbathing at taxpayers expense" – for the past six weeks.

"Miss Temple's finances are believed to be in good health," sniffed the paper. "She is thought to have moved out of her home in Lindford, Hampshire, to rent a property in more upmarket Farnham, and has regularly been spotted enjoying lunches at a wine bar in the town."

The paper declined to estimate exactly how well-off Miss Temple was – a curious coyness since it is well aware that she banked a £250,000 cheque just weeks ago, courtesy of the *Mail on Sunday*, to whom she sold her exclusive account of her trysts with the Deputy Prime Minister.

"NO foreign prisoners to be deported" screamed the *Daily Mirror*'s front-page headline last Thursday.

A full page inside was also devoted to the "full shocking story" that none of the 1,000 foreign criminals freed without being considered for deportation would ever be sent home.

Only the previous day, blissfully unaware that her leaky staff were briefing the *Mirror*, top Home Office bod Lin Homer emailed her entire department with a morale-boosting pep talk claiming that "the press interest in the criminals issue appears to have died down at last".

As the other Homer would say: D'Oh…

"SARAH's Mum Backs Our Paedo Law Campaign", roared the front page of the *Daily Mirror* on 13 June, launching the paper's "Life Must Mean Life campaign" with the wholehearted support of Sara Payne, whose daughter was murdered in 2000.

"I live with a life sentence because a paedophile who was guilty of a previous child sex crime was allowed back on the streets," Mrs Payne was quoted as telling the paper. "I fear one day some judge might release that individual. I fully support any initiative to protect children by giving full life sentences for repeat offenders."

There was just one problem with this – Sara Payne had not actually spoken to anyone at the *Mirror*. "I am extremely disappointed that I have been misrepresented," she told journalists' trade mag *Press Gazette* last week. "It is wrong to picture me on the front page of a national newspaper with a headline and direct quotes when nobody has actually bothered to call me. This is sloppy journalism at its very worst."

The paper, however, is not one to hold a grudge – as it demonstrated with its editorial column on Monday, which celebrated the news that the government is reconsidering the introduction of "Sarah's Law" – for which Ms Payne has been campaigning for the past six years – thus: "Home Secretary John Reid's announcement that he is to revisit the flawed idea of a 'Sarah's Law' smacks of a crowd-pleasing gimmick when the public wants tough action not hollow initiatives… Knee-jerk reactions designed to grab headlines are no substitute for a long, cool, logical look at how we can keep our children safe."

"THIS culture of swearing curses us all," ran the headline on a *Daily Mail* leader-page essay last week. As Ofcom imposed fines on various Radio One DJs for turning the air blue, former *Today* presenter Sue MacGregor was called upon to deliver 1,000 words about the ghastliness of the modern world. "What is so disturbing about the very public use of offensive words is the naked aggression it displays, and the ingrained and deep contempt for others."

If MacGregor thinks Chris Moyles saying "fucking" once or twice on air constitutes a decline in public decency, heaven only knows what she would say of a newspaper editor who makes such liberal use of the c-word that his daily editorial conferences are known as "the vagina monologues".

Who might this aggressive and contemptuous boss be? Step forward the *Mail*'s very own Paul Dacre.

THE *Torygraph* is gearing up for its grand move this autumn from Canary Wharf to Victoria (or, as the posher hacks prefer to call it, Belgravia borders).

Deputy Editor Will Lewis is in charge of the move and has recruited around 20 staff from various departments to act as guinea-pigs to see how the new office will run.

Reports filtering back to the newsroom are far from reassuring. The guinea-pigs are being bombarded with management-speak: hacks are apparently no longer to be called journalists but "producers" or, even worse, "media conductors". They have "round table meetings" to discuss "customer segmentation data" and to share "the *Telegraph*'s brand and business vision".

As if that weren't bad enough, the journalists – sorry, media conductors – taking part have now been asked to set up their own pages on the networking website Myspace.com, and share their star signs and sexual preferences with the world, along with their taste in music, books and film. The intention is apparently to "personalise" *Telegraph* hacks to their readers – and not just to put money in the pocket of Rupert Murdoch, proprietor of the paper's biggest rival the *Times*, who also happens to own MySpace.

JOURNALISTS' trade title *Press Gazette* last week recruited a group of 11-to-15-year-olds to cast what it called an "Expert Eye" over *First News*, the weekly children's newspaper launched in a blaze of publicity a month previously.

They concluded that it was "well put together", "great" and "user-friendly and understandable". This will have delighted *First News'* editorial director, Piers Morgan, who also happens to be the owner of... *Press Gazette.*

BEFORE the *Financial Times*'s new chief executive Rona Fairhead gets to grips with the alarming fall in the newspaper's UK circulation or decides whether to flog off the *FT* entirely, there are more pressing issues requiring her attention.

As part of the office refurbishment being undertaken at the *FT*'s Southwark Bridge headquarters, the previous chief executive, Olivier Fleurot, moved into a sparkling new office just a few weeks ago. Rona feels this is not grand enough for her, and so it is to be knocked down and a larger one built.

Even more problematic is finding an office for Rona's chauffeur. Hacks who have had the temerity to inquire why a chauffeur needs an office have completely failed to appreciate that chauffeurs at the *FT* – there are four because the directors, Marjorie Scardino, David Bell, John Makinson and Rona Fairhead each insist on having their own – require Sky TV for the sport and need access to the internet. These perks ensure they don't complain about ferrying executives' spouses and children or doing their shopping.

The *FT* has decided that its large and highly paid administrative and buildings team aren't qualified to knock up a few partitions so a space-planning consultant at a paltry £850 a day has been recruited to supervise the refurbishment. One of her first decisions was to hire another consultant to undertake the space-planning.

THE *Sun*'s "Goldengate" campaign to prove that *Big Brother* housemate Susie Verrico's entry to the house was the result of a fixed on-screen lottery of "golden ticket" winners continues with forensic zeal.

Last week it produced a special cut-out-and-keep card entitled "THE EVIDENCE", which contained the following clincher: "She has auditioned for *Big Brother* THREE times before".

Presumably the paper assumed that only people with no interest in appearing on *Big Brother* would enter a competition to appear on *Big Brother*...

MADE-UP LETTER

Sir,

I couldn't help noticing the astonishing similarity between the "Hard Core Porn Shame" of Heather Mills-McCartney, as revealed by the Sun on June 5, and the pre-marital romp enjoyed in Deidre's Photo Casebook in the Sun on June 7. The difference, of course, is that one comes from a lavishly-illustrated reference guide to help couples solve problems with their sex lives, and the other is pornographic filth published by a foreigner.

Yours sincerely,
ENA BEATLE.

NOVELIST Frederick Forsyth reminisced last week about the good old days with his mate Charles Haughey, reminding Irish readers of the *Daily Mail* that Haughey's "love affair with Terry Keane... was relentlessly exposed in the London satirical magazine, *Private Eye*."

Forsyth revealed that he knew the identity of the *Eye*'s mole in Dublin, but said he kept quiet lest "a wall might fall on him some dark night". Apparently unconcerned that "if you upset him [Haughey] badly enough a period of ill health might ensue", Forsyth insisted he was a good ol' boy really.

The novelist certainly enjoyed a charmed existence on his friend's watch. He moved to Ireland in the 1970s to take advantage of the tax-exemption for writers introduced by a finance minister called C. Haughey. As a wealthy, high-profile Brit in County Wicklow, he could have been "a tasty target" for the IRA. But he had friends in high places.

"Taoiseach he may have been, but Charles could, via one of two priests, talk to the IRA army council anytime and be listened to extremely seriously indeed. He was not a man they wanted to upset. When I told him my wife's fears, he rang me back within two days to tell me that as far as the hardmen were concerned, I was completely ring fenced from harm."

That might have had something to do with the fact that Haughey supplied them with some of the guns they were using to kidnap and kill people in the first place, but Forsyth was too tactful to mention that.

DEATHWATCH

THE death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi on 8 June prompted frenzied activity in Whitehall and in the press lobby.

When Downing Street first got wind the al-Qaeda leader in Iraq might have met his death, it was eager to put out a statement announcing the news at the first opportunity. Army chiefs immediately warned that the reports from Iraq were unconfirmed and that it would take up to three hours for any corpse to be properly identified using DNA. Within an hour, however, Number Ten had issued a release celebrating al-Zarqawi's demise.

For the PM's foreign policy adviser, Nigel Sheinwald, even this was not enough. He was soon putting pressure on military top brass to confirm the involvement of British troops in the operation. Told there had been no such involvement, Sheinwald pleaded that surely he could at least hint at the role of special forces. He was swiftly rebutted.

That didn't stop the *Sun*'s political editor George Pascoe-Watson from pursuing the same line. Desperate to tell *Sun* readers of "our boys'" contribution, Pascoe-Watson revealed in an "exclusive" that "British spies played a pivotal role in helping to nail al Zarqawi... MI6 officers helped identify the whereabouts of the al-Qaeda general and his henchmen before the US air strike." According to an anonymous source, "the intelligence services and special forces have been working with American colleagues".

This last bit was technically true but, as both the MoD and the *Sun*'s own defence correspondent Simon Hughes had told him, it had no relation to the strike. As if to warn readers the story was nonsense, the paper's subs inserted a glaring misprint into the headline:

CRUICAL ROLE OF MI6

MEANWHILE at the *Independent*, Robert Fisk was sighing wearily over the death: "So, it's another 'mission accomplished'... The man immortalised by the Americans as the most dangerous terrorist since the last most dangerous terrorist, is killed... and Messrs Bush and Blair see fit to boast of his demise. To this have our leaders descended. And how short are our memories."

Including his. Until very recently Fisk was telling his fans around the world that Zarqawi had probably died years ago. "I don't know if al-Zarqawi is alive or exists at the moment," he said in an Australian radio interview on 3 February. "I don't know if he isn't a sort of creature invented in order to fill in the narrative gaps, so to speak."

He returned to the subject in an *Indie* column on 19 March: "Many Iraqis – along, I have to admit, with myself – have grave doubts about whether Zarqawi exists."

Why doubt it? Interviewed on the American TV show *Democracy Now* on 7 April, Fisk outlined his theory that Zarqawi "was killed in one of the initial air raids on Iraq in the north-eastern area, in the Kurdish area, and that his ID has somehow come to be used by some other institution... I don't know."

Whoops! Less than three weeks later, recent images of Zarqawi appeared on a new video. "They do look like him," Fisk admitted to Australia's ABC on 26 April. "I think it's pretty clear that he's alive." His conclusion? "It clearly is a blow to the United States in the sense that they have several times claimed that they've killed him, which they obviously haven't done."

But not, of course, a blow to the hack who also believed the US had killed him.

RUPERT MURDOCH displayed his environmental credentials with an impressive display of recycling following the death.

Twenty four years and one month after the *Sun* celebrated the sinking of the General Belgrano, his *New York Post* reported the killing of the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq with the front page headine: "GOTCHA!"

WHAT did British troops in Basra make of new Defence Secretary Des Browne on his inaugural visit last month? "Smug, sleek and fat and every inch a New Labour apparatchik," one of them informs Lord Gnome.

The hero of the hour is a young squaddie who, while Browne was meeting and greeting, asked what he knew of the military.

"Not much," the minister admitted. "But what do you know about politics?"

"Well," said the soldier, "I can lie well!"

MONTHS of negotiation between the Department of Health (DoH) and the supposedly independent National Audit Office (NAO) on the NHS's £12.4bn National Programme for IT (NPfIT) have concluded with yet another whitewash.

Despite being two years behind schedule after only three years and set to cost twice what everybody thought, the programme is, according to the auditors, making "substantial progress".

As the *Eye* has reported, only a fraction of the essential part of NPfIT, the care records service under which every NHS trust should have clerical and clinical systems that can talk to each other, has been achieved. What success there has been – much puffed in the NAO report – is in bog standard tasks such as installing broadband, for which a typically New Labour multi-billion pound IT initiative was completely unnecessary.

WILL the business-friendly Labour government object to the Spanish firm Ferrovial's takeover of such a massive strategic asset as the British Airports Authority (BAA)? Don't bet on it.

New Labour is unlikely to argue with the board of a big company like BAA (which backs the takeover) – and it may well help that that former Cabinet Office civil servant Alice Perkins, aka Mrs Jack Straw, joined the BAA board in March.

JACK STRAW's recent interview with the *Spectator* includes this sideswipe at spin-doctors – and implicitly, at Tony Blair. "I detest people trying to use the communications system to tell stories which don't stack up."

Yes indeed: Straw detests it so much that two years ago he used his spin-doctor at the Foreign Office, John Williams, to tell a pack of lies to the *Observer*.

The paper was pursuing a story that the British government had advance knowledge of the famous "Smelly and Scratcher" plot to stage a coup in Equatorial Guinea in March 2004. Having told the reporter that this was untrue, Williams reinforced the message by ringing *Observer* editor Roger Alton to assure him on Straw's behalf that Whitehall "had no prior knowledge of the alleged plot".

As Peter Oborne revealed in his book *The Rise of Political Lying*, Williams then went further. He said these were grave allegations which implied that Britain had been indirectly complicit in a conspiracy to bring down an internationally recognised government. The *Observer* should think very carefully indeed before running such a damaging falsehood. In the circumstances, Alton felt he had no choice but to change the story.

But the only falsehoods were those emanating from Straw's spin-doctor. Soon afterwards the Foreign Secretary was forced to admit that the FO had indeed known about the plot as early as January 2004.

Straw's new role, since being moved in the reshuffle, is to "rebuild trust in British politics". Who better?

WHEN it emerged last year that tens of thousands of immigrants were paid millions in tax credits simply because they had national insurance numbers when these were no guarantee of entitlement, the story was dismissed as just another in a long line of cock-ups.

Now an internal document discovered by the BBC and seen by the *Eye* shows that for 18 months Revenue officials were instructed to pay tax credits without investigating cases where "residency criteria" were failed.

Not only is evidence of a policy to turn a blind eye to incorrect payments highly damaging, it flatly contradicts an explanation given in parliament last November by Paymaster-General Dawn Primarolo that "these payments were made because of an error on the part of HMRC". By no stretch of the imagination was the policy an "error"; it was quite deliberate and cost millions of pounds.

The Treasury would not say whether Primarolo knew about and approved the policy. But either way, once again on tax credits, "Red" Dawn appears to have misled the House.

DESPITE the hugely expensive flop of the Connexions card for 16 to 19 year olds, and the news that the Criminal Records Bureau falsely assigned criminal records to 2,273 people, dear old Capita has just got a new job.

The world's worst outsourcing firm has been appointed "compensation administrator" for the Pension Protection Fund, the safety net for members of schemes whose employers have gone bust. Thus Crapita will be responsible for "paying the right person the right compensation at the right time". As if those whose retirement savings are thrown into doubt didn't have enough to worry about…

CALLED TO ORDURE

CREATED just five years ago, the Electoral Commission loves to portray itself a snowy-haired elder at the nation's high table. But is the commission, which sponged up £28.8m of public cash in 2004/05, in fact a jobsworthian waste of money run by spineless quangocrats? Widespread vote-rigging. Party funding scandals. It's hardly a picture of success, is it?

The commission's chairman, Sam Younger, had some sticky moments at a Westminster hearing the other day. He was being quizzed by Sir Alastair Graham, no-nonsense head of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. Graham has bravely attacked political sleaze in recent weeks and has received lamentably little support from his fellow regulators. Here was his chance for revenge.

Younger opened with some guff about how he was providing "leadership of the electoral administraton and returning officer community" (an ex-BBC suit, he speaks fluent jargon). Graham sucked on his teeth and noted that a previous witness had called British election administration "a disgrace".

Younger responded with a liquid smile. "I have to say I do not recognise the picture," he began. Graham said he'd heard there could be seven million voters missing from the current electoral register. "Have you any comment?" The hapless Younger answered that the commission had published a booklet called *Understanding Registration*. Wow! Younger admitted that he didn't have "specific evidence" about the number of people who had fallen off the register. Graham said it was all "a pretty poor state of affairs".

Lady Shephard, the former Tory MP who sits on Graham's board, waded into the fast-developing bloodbath. "If you don't know, who should know?" she asked Younger. The commission chief pleaded that he lacked the power to uncover the true statistics. Or as he put it: "The ability to put a figure on those who have been on the register and should not be is actually something that I do not know methodologically how you go about doing it."

Shephard quizzed Younger repeatedly about his "leadership". After listening to his flailing answers, she paused for a deadly second and then said coldly: "I see."

Graham also wanted to know what Younger had known during the general election campaign about parties accepting loans. Had he told politicians to beware this dubious practice? Had he been listened to? "It does seem to me you are a pretty ineffective regulator," said Graham. "There does seem to be a leadership issue."

Younger replied that he didn't think it his duty to tell political parties that he thought they might be breaking the law. This may surprise those who have frequently heard politicians pray in aid to the name of the Electoral Commission as some type of marvelously tough scrutineer. Do MPs like the commission because they know it is toothless?

The commission answers to something called the Speaker's Committee, whose members include not only gormless Michael Martin but also Labour grandees Lord Falconer and Sir Gerald Kaufman. The Speaker's Committee is a secretive body whose meetings are not open to the public. Younger admitted this was regrettable. Perhaps he knows the sort of things they talk about.

Another member of the Speaker's Committee is Lib Dem MP Alan Beith. Perhaps Lady Maddock, one of Alastair Graham's sidekicks, can have a word with him. She is, after all, Alan Beith's wife. Cosy little affair, the British establishment.

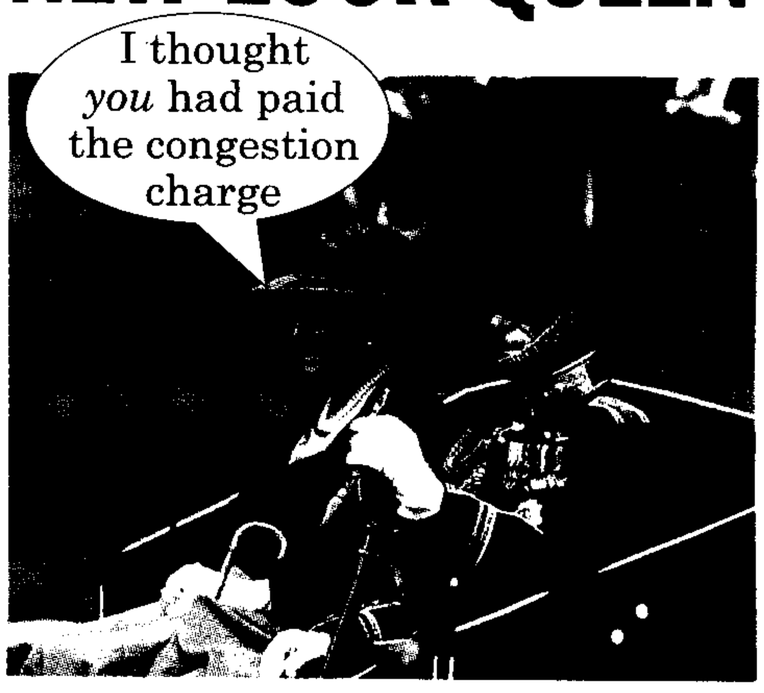
'Gavel Basher'

JUST FANCY THAT!

"A devastated husband last night told how his wife dumped him and ran off with their MP. Vicky Rogers set up a love nest with top Lib Dem Matthew Taylor, 43, and is now four months pregnant with his child." – *News of the World*, 28 May 2006.

"As an MP, I've got used to leading two lives…" – *Matthew Taylor MP, on his website*, 23 February 2004.

NEW LOOK QUEEN



WITHIN weeks of coming to power nine years ago, New Labour set about righting one of the most egregious wrongs of the Tory years: pensions mis-selling.

Scores of firms were summoned to Whitehall to be told in no uncertain terms to compensate the victims of their outrageous claims. Now the biggest bogus pension claim ever has been exposed – and its perpetrator is the same government that was once so concerned about retirement savings.

In April the government rejected calls from the Parliamentary Ombudsman to compensate around 85,000 people whose employers went bust leaving their pension schemes in the lurch after years of government mismanagement and false assurances (see *Eye* 1156). The main reason was cost. Tony Blair explained to the Commons that nobody could expect the taxpayer to fork out £15bn – a huge amount that might have made some see his point.

But as the *Eye* explained, campaigners suspected the figure was spurious. Now, buried in the detail of Pensions Secretary John Hutton's formal response to the ombudsman, comes the true cost: around £3bn – and that's without knocking off the savings that would come with reduced benefit payments if the lost pensions were met. Even this exaggerates the impact; it would equate to average annual payments of around £50m. Pensions for public sector workers cost the government around £20bn a year, or 40 times as much. And the total cost of future public sector pensions at today's prices is around £530bn, or 180 times the commitment the ombudsman wants for the workers and pensioners who lost out.

The compensation is thus eminently affordable and as arrangements have been made for people losing their pensions in future, would set little precedent – other than the extraordinary one of admitting a mistake and making amends. That would be another departure from New Labour principles.

"OUR justice system is a sick joke," announced the *Sun*'s most gor-blimey columnist last week, leaping on to the bandwagon that followed the sentencing of paedophile Craig Sweeney. "Like many *Sun* readers, I despair when a few of our judges deal with dangerous criminals as though they were simply naughty boys."

Unlike many *Sun* readers, however, former Home Secretary David Blunkett – for it was he – was actually responsible for ensuring that this happens. Not that his fans would have learned this from his column, which was curiously coy about the role he played.

"What should the judges do? They could start using the tougher terms laid down in the Criminal Justice and Sentencing Act – including what are called 'indeterminate sentences' because they don't specify a release date – which are only decided when we are sure it is safe to let the prisoner out," Blunkett wrote. He failed to point out, however, that it was this same Criminal Justice and Sentencing Act, as introduced by his department in 2003, which ruled that criminals who plead guilty should receive a 33 percent reduction in their sentence – which automatically knocked six years off Sweeney's 18-year sentence – and guaranteed he would be considered for parole within five.

LABOUR MP Nigel Griffiths has been doing some adroit and persistent sucking-up to Tony Blair.

Griffiths has long been regarded as a Gordon Brownite but his behaviour on recent Wednesdays suggests otherwise. At Prime Minister's Questions every week he stands right next to the Speaker's chair. This means that when Blair leaves the chamber at the end of PMQs, he has to walk straight past little Griffiths.

Each week this happens, and each week Griffiths, beaming broadly, is able to clap Blair on the shoulder – "well *done*, Prime Minister!" – and then escort him through the throng of other bystanders – "allow *me*, Prime Minister!" – while he pushes open the doors for Blair.

'Backbiter'

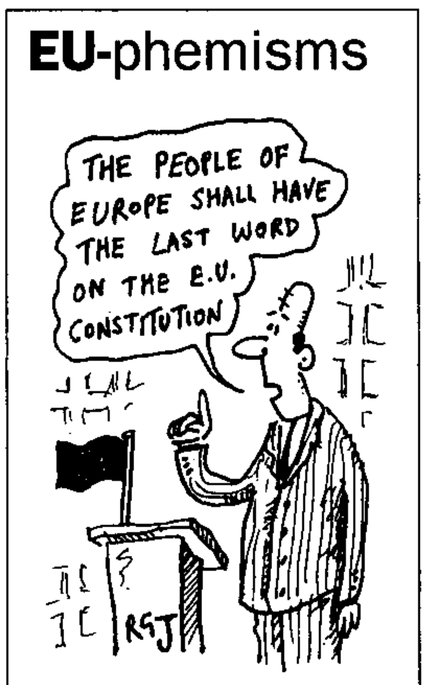
CHERYL GILLAN MP

IN THE last *Eye* (HP Sauce) we drew attention to Shadow Welsh Secretary Cheryl Gillan's part-time job with PKF, as noted in the register of members' interests. Ms Gillan points out that the entry should have been removed at the end of March – but due to a cock-up at the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards it wasn't.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE European Commission likes to blow its green trumpet, but the only sound emerging lately has been a raspberry.

The recent launch of a campaign on climate change wasn't helped by Commission president José Manuel Barroso's refusal to give up his gas-guzzling Volkswagen Touareg SUV. Far more serious is the commission's increasing willingness to pull the plug on environmental legislation that has been mooted for several years.



And we've decided that the word is "yes"

For example, commission vice-president Günter Verheugen and prominent supporters such as Irish commissioner Charlie McCreevy have been blocking new rules on soil protection that threaten to upset their powerful business friends.

The long-awaited proposals were due for publication on 24 March but were delayed, said a spokeswoman, because there were too many other press conferences that day. A new date was set for 7 June, but the strategy again failed to appear.

Verheugen stepped in because the proposal for a mandatory EU register of contaminated sites – a first step towards rehabilitation – would cost money. But don't expect much of a fuss outside the green lobby: soil, contaminated or otherwise, isn't sexy.

THE boss of a Welsh company set up for the purposes of making EU grants to boost the rural economy is facing charges of false accounting after police visited the company's offices.

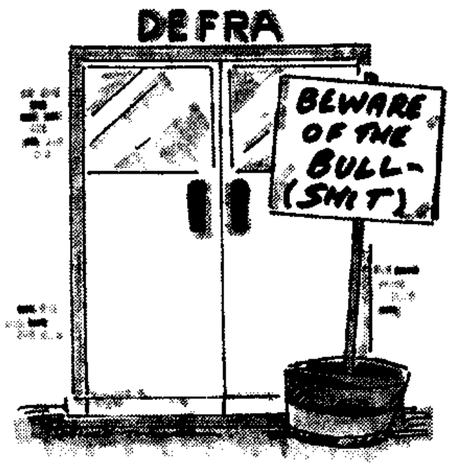
Porthmadog-based Cymad is a non-profit "enterprise agency" funded by the European Union and Welsh local government bodies to deal with grants made through the LEADER scheme (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Economie Rurale).

Cymad's manager, Elwyn Vaughan, was arrested by North Wales Police on 14 June and charged with two counts of false accounting. As well as running the company, Vaughan is a former director of elections for Plaid Cymru and still involved with the party. Cymad's chairman, Gwynfor Owen, is also a leading Plaid activist.

The Welsh Assembly's auditor-general launched an inquiry into Cymad last month, following repeated calls for an investigation from Porthmadog councillors, MP Hywel Williams and Labour party assembly candidate Martin Eaglestone, ever since the company hit local headlines in January for suspending its finance boss, Aeron Jones, while he was at his daughter's bedside in hospital. Police visited their offices in May. Vaughan is to appear at Pwllheli Magistrates Court on 21 June.

Whatever the outcome of the case, it certainly raises the question of whether it's appropriate for a grant-arranging company to be so close to a political party.

Down on the Farm



THE media had a field day with the revelations of recent "depraved" goings-on at the Rural Payments Agency in Newcastle: civil servants caught on CCTV jumping naked off filing cabinets, drug-taking and coupling in the loos, and staging break-dancing competitions during working hours.

So excited were agency staff at seeing their antics all over the newspapers that they celebrated by hitting the town in "a booze-fuelled night of madness". And this is the agency which managed to cock up the payment of EU subsidies to farmers so badly that, even by this government's standards, it must rank as one of the most laughable examples of official incompetence on record.

What didn't win much publicity, however, were the leaked internal emails showing the contempt in which these agency officials hold the farming community they are meant to serve. These described individual farmers as "silly", "unhinged", "crazy", even if their only failing had been to make a tiny error filling in some complex form. As observed here before, it is obvious that the officials deeply resent the fact that their job is to hand out taxpayers' money to farmers, and delight in finding any excuse for withholding it.

But of course the RPA staff are far from alone in their hostility to the farming community, as followers of Private Eye's correspondence column might recognise. What is striking about the letters criticising this column is the hatred they display to farmers in general. All farmers are condemned equally, as greedy parasites, polluting the countryside, destroying wildlife, cruel to their animals. So venomously one-sided are these farmer-haters it never seems to cross their minds that there are good farmers and bad, just as there are good and bad lawyers, journalists, even readers of Private Eye.

'Muckspreader'

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

THOUGH Lord Chancellor Charlie Falconer insists there must be "enforceability if there is to be true freedom of information", does he put his money where his mouth is?

Falconer has just refused Information Commissioner Richard Thomas's pleas for an extra £1.1m to supplement his paltry £5m budget, awarding him less than half despite evidence to parliament that the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is unable to cope with the volume of complaints against refusals of FoI requests by public bodies.

Among its many difficulties, the ICO has trouble recruiting staff and can only pay employees 15 percent less than counterparts elsewhere in the civil service. The result is that complaints take an age to resolve.

Chasing up one of its own ancient complaints, the *Eye* established that ICO officials are only now getting round to looking at referrals from last summer. In other words, it takes a whole year from sending a complaint to the ICO before anybody even looks at it. Resolving the matter then depends on further months negotiating with often foot-dragging public bodies.

This means the government can kick any embarrassing questions into the long grass for at least a couple of years – by which time ministers, advisers and in all probability the story itself will have moved on. So much for enforceability.

TV

World Cup 2006 (BBC1/ITV1)

THE dream of all broadcasters is to have the show that almost everyone in the country wants to watch. But this has very rarely happened: the moon landings and then a series of events involving Princess Diana: wedding, interview about divorce, death. World Cups, in this respect, are tantalising.

In the opening rounds – when games are divided up – BBC or ITV are guaranteed massive interest but so far the coverage has tended to be rather nervous and defensive which at least is appropriate to England's early performances.

Fittingly – again – both TV teams had begun with selection dilemmas. **World Cup Match of the Day Live** on BBC1 had decided before the tournament to drop Graeme Le Saux from the punditry squad, calling in Mark Lawrenson to sit in the hole beside John Motson in the commentary box during games. The word from inside the camp was that Le Saux was too reluctant to criticise current players who had only recently been mates and that the tactics for this mondiale were intelligent analysis.

ITV's **World Cup 06** had also made a late change. Gabby Yorath, after a run as studio captain intended to bring more women viewers to the channel's coverage, was brutally dropped and replaced with the eerily personality-free Steve Rider, who was required to commute between Grand Prix races and the major games. This was a high-risk strategy for an outfit which had also lost its most impressive pundit, Big Ron Atkinson, for racist remarks off the ball.

These troubled preparations showed in the opening coverage. Broadcasts of England games by the BBC have always struggled with the question of whether they were there to report or support. But, clearly worried by the sacrifice of Le Saux for being too nice about his former colleagues, Lawrenson, Alan Hansen, Alan Shearer and Ian Wright were lining up in the BBC box to denigrate England's playing, although admittedly the performances gave them the opening to do so.

But the coverage was tactically confused. The BBC's head of sport, ex-news man Roger Mosey, is currently advertising for a sports editor, a sort of jock-

"The advantage of this set is that it can't be turned off"

strap version of Nick Robinson, with the brief of reporting games seriously and, from the evidence of the first week in Germany, this is desperately needed. On the matter of Wayne's metatarsal, Lineker and his lads seemed to know less than was in the papers, leaving the informed reporting to their radio colleagues on 5 Live.

Oddly, the telly lads had decided that what was required from them was not journalism but comedy. Commentator John Motson, notoriously a stats man, has suddenly taken to attempting jokes at every turn. While, presumably deluded by favourable comments from ad-men during Walker's Crisp shoots, Gary Lineker seems to have defined himself as a comedian and seems now to spend most of each game working on puns for his pay-off line. For example, Germany happens to have players called Frings and Klose.

So, after the opening game, in which the host nation eventually won easily after briefly struggling, Gazza grinningly signed off with: "It was looking Klose for a while, but Frings turned out all right in the end." In the same team's second game, a chap called Neuville scored, leading a beaming host to close (or, in his head, Klose) the programme with the line "And Neuville breaks his duck!" – a lunatically elaborate play on the name of an ancient children's television puppet.

Noticing that many of the South Korean team are called Park, viewers were uneasy through each of their fixtures. Would the pun, when it came, involve a walk in the park or being played off one? The team's display dictated the latter. It is, however, clear that the BBC has placed some names off limits for this game: principally, Brazil's Kaka.

ITV at least doesn't have that problem. Steve Rider is such a straight man that he could be used as a spirit-level and Gabby Yorath's understandable sulking during the late-night highlights packages casts a pall over those shows as well.

The reason the coverage on both sides feels so jumpy and uncertain is that the broadcasters are getting more feedback than ever before. In previous tournaments, the telly lads sat in their deluxe hotels talking up their own performances in the bar and on the golf-course. Now, though, they're subjected to interactive data (millions using their red button to silence Motty's comments during the game), chat-room and blog bollocks and overnight reviews of the coverage in every paper.

The result is coverage by performers nervous of being dropped and desperately trying out different styles to see if one works. Exactly like the England team although the problem for viewers is that the broadcasters can't come home early: we're stuck with them for another four weeks.

'Remote Controller'

I-SKY

THE Sun's campaign to "fight the World Cup killjoys" and see the flag of St George "proudly fluttering all around the country" during the World Cup (just like it, er, wasn't already) scored a remarkable victory on 3 June.

One telecommunications company declared itself unafraid to display its patriotic fervour on its nationwide fleet of vans. Or, as the *Sun* put it beneath a picture of the logo in question, "Vantastic… Sky's allegiance is clear."

Good to see the Oz-born Yank who just happens to own both companies doing his bit!

"One line of inquiry was that the gas was to be released in a busy and enclosed shopping centre, which mirrors the current plotline in the Sky hit drama 24 starring Kiefer Sutherland."

– ***News of the World*, June 4**

THE REAL & ORIGINAL DUMB BRITAIN

ONLY in Private Eye!

BBC Radio Suffolk

Nick Risby: Name Britain's first and only Jewish Prime Minister.

Contestant *(after long deliberation)*: Is it Ariel Sharon?

Fifteen-to-One, Challenge TV

William G. Stewart: Judaism. Who in the UK is the Chief Rabbi?

Contestant: Lionel Blair.

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: According to the authorised version of the Bible, who was the first woman on Earth?

Contestant *(after long pause)*: Mary.

Robinson: Which member of the Marx brothers was often seen on screen smoking a cigar?

Contestant: Karl.

Beware rip-off imitations!

AD NAUSEAM

Curse of the World Cup Cash-In

***EYE* 1153 looked at Nike's "Joga Bonita" World Cup ad campaign, noting how almost all the players involved struggled to live up to Eric Cantona's dictum that "this game is about skills, heart, honour, joy, team spirit."**

Football these days, as Nike well knows, is first and foremost about money. But what its misfiring ad also showed was that relying on footballers to get your message across is a risky business: they have a habit of nutmegging the marketing men almost as adroitly as they do defenders.

So it was with Wayne Rooney who, as if anyone could forget, proceeded to break his foot and was ruled out of the early stages of the tournament. With the sweetest of ironies he had just started wearing Nike's much-touted new boot.

Other stars of the Joga Bonita campaign who have also been afflicted by the dreaded "curse of cash-in" include Ronaldo, Nike's talisman, who was overweight, uninterested, ineffectual and eventually substituted in Brazil's first two games. His own personal Joga Bonita ad, "Homage", was due for worldwide release last week, but Nike is now refusing to confirm when it will run. His teammate Ronaldinho, who, like Rooney, was also granted a Joga Bonita spot of his own, has also failed to make an impression in the tournament so far. France's Thierry Henry, meanwhile, announced that he was defecting to Reebok (owned by Nike's arch-rivals Adidas) less than a month after the campaign broke. Funny what £10m does to "heart", "honour" and "team spirit".

Over at Adidas the "+10" campaign has likewise hoodooed most of its famous faces. In the launch spot, wide-eyed street kids picked imaginary world teams (all of whom just happened to be in the pay of a certain German sports goods manufacturer). Of those featured, France's Djibril Cissé broke his leg in the warm-up and has played no part; Michael Ballack missed the opening game; Oliver Kahn is no longer Germany's first-choice keeper; Zinedine Zidane and Patrick Vieira look shadows of their former selves; and Jermain Defoe didn't even make the plane.

Still, at least Adidas covered its back this time, by adding computer-generated footage of legends Franz Beckenbauer and Michel Platini trotting out to join the kids' teams. The message for future World Cup campaigns is clear: stick with players who've already retired. At least you can rely on their performance.

"Here come the Iranian footballers' wives"

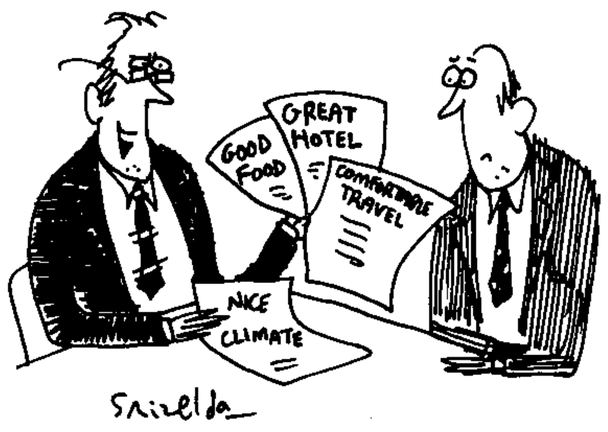
MEDIA NEWS

NEWS arrives concerning Peter Robertson, new "Head of Geographic Group" at BBC Monitoring in Caversham.

Last December, before Robertson invented the new post for himself, he was sent a letter from two BBC Monitoring staff at the Uzbekistan bureau complaining about the brutal management style of their boss, Jamil Burna Asefi.

They were apparently so frightened of him that they asked that their names would not be disclosed "as we feared consequences". By complete coincidence, Asefi issued them both with redundancy notices a mere 10 days later – in breach of both BBC employment rules and Uzbek labour laws.

Naturally the hacks complained again. Robertson denied disclosing their names, but confirmed, curiously enough, that Asefi had seen their original letter. Now Robertson has visited Uzbekistan for a question and answer session (one of a number of jollies he has required the licence-payer to fund). Sadly, Q&As relating to redundancy were not on the agenda.



"These are the results of my fact-finding mission"

"WE'RE inviting a sample of ITV employees to take part in the ITV Pulse Employee Survey," read the email that landed in many newsroom inboxes on 6 June. "This is to track how people are feeling since the last company pulse survey."

Pretty hacked off was how most staff were feeling when they received the message, since no one had thought to warn pollsters MORI, who were running the survey, that 6 June would be the very day ITV called employees into a meeting to tell them about job losses in regional news.

Forty jobs are to go thanks to a shake up that includes the merging of the Meridian West and Central South areas. ITV staff, through their union BECTU, have publicly said that the move will undermine ITV's commitment to regional broadcasting. What they said on the survey may have been rather less repeatable.

BBC staff in Leeds were told of the impending visit of deputy director-general Mark Byford with a series of faintly patronising posters claiming that the "Big Guns Roll into Town!"

There was also a friendly email from Tamsin O'Brien, head of BBC Yorkshire, encouraging them to "come along – I realise it is outside your working day but it's all about our future… it's free and I am doing wine and nibbles beforehand."

Just in case not everyone got the message, the entire technical staff discovered that no matter what time they were due to start work on 8 June, their shifts had all been extended to finish at 9pm that evening, making attendance compulsory!

FOOTIE 'N' MOUTH DISEASE

A game of two halves

"In a new twist to the tortuous saga, England's medical team now believe the injury is less complicated than it looked nine days ago, when United announced that one of the breaks was on the joint. Rooney has been given special insoles to wear while training and kicking the ball, to minimise the risk of causing fresh damage to his injury." – **Daily Telegraph, *6 June***

"Upbeat Wayne Rooney is so confident of being fully fit for the World Cup that he has dismissed the idea of extra protection in his boots. Rooney has consulted with his United medical team, and they see no reason why he would require special padding." – **Daily Mirror, *7 June***

"If any team are going to cause a surprise, I think it could be Ivory Coast… Ivory Coast could easily surprise us all and make it into the last 16. I think they could be a bit like Cameroon in 1990. It was only after the tournament that you realised what a really good side they were." – ***Mark Lawrenson, BBC Online, 5 June***

"Mention of Ivory Coast prompts me to suggest I do not see them doing as well as many pundits are predicting. My feeling about sides like Ivory Coast and Ghana is that, in the end, you are only as good as your worst player and I suspect that both teams have some poor players in their starting line-ups." – ***Mark Lawrenson*, Irish Times, *9 June***

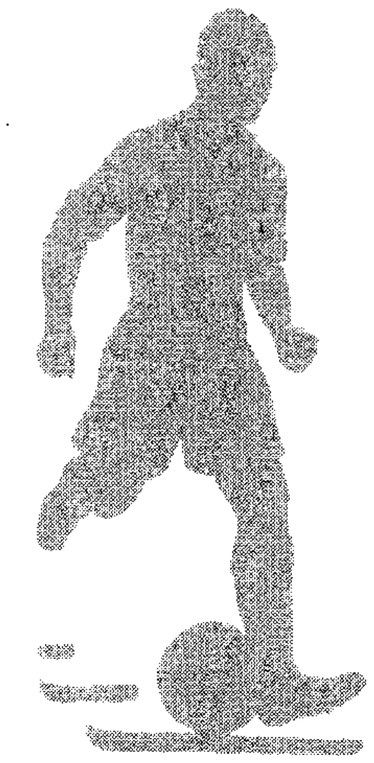
"Harry Redknapp has tipped Theo Walcott to be England's secret World Cup weapon. He said, 'the lad is a real talent. He has so much ability and his pace is frightening. He is quicker than anyone else I have seen… This could be a tactical master-stroke from Sven.'" – **Sun, *9 May***

"Harry Redknapp has launched an amazing attack on England striker Theo Walcott, telling the 17-year-old: 'You're not good enough.' And he believes England coach Sven Goran Eriksson blundered in taking him to Germany. 'Eriksson has made a fundamental error by selecting Walcott,' said Portsmouth manager Redknapp." – **Mirror, *15 June***

"Munich has been strangely devoid of serious World Cup atmosphere as the kick-off approaches." – **Daily Telegraph, *9 June, page 6***

"It only really hit me when I flew into Munich last week and I've been in a happy mood ever since. The atmosphere in Germany is fantastic." – **Daily Telegraph, *9 June, page 6***

"Rooney's fiancée Coleen McLoughlin was seen giggling with Stephen Gerrard's fiancée Alex Curran as the match began." – **Mail on Sunday, *11 June, page 3***



"Only Alex Curran, 23, engaged to Steven Gerrard, maintained a frosty distance, sitting at the other end of the terrace. Apparently Miss Curran and Miss McLoughlin, both Liverpudlians, are no longer the friends they once were." – **Mail on Sunday, *11 June, page 4***

Hat trick

"And when Eriksson did make the change, it was as if a switch had been flicked. On came a Rooney champing at the bit." – **Daily Express, *16 June, page 83***

"It was like flicking a switch. On came Rooney and England suddenly had tempo, belief, guile and gusto." – **Daily Express, *16 June, page 84***

"Rooney's arrival, in tandem with the exciting Aaron Lennon, was akin to flicking a switch." – **Daily Express, *16 June, page 87***.

Surprise results

20 = Number of pages devoted to World Cup in **Observer, *11 June***

10 = Number of pages devoted to UK news in **Observer, *11 June***

Match stats

"32 teams, 64 matches, 30 billion fans, 96 hours of footie, one beautiful game" – **Daily Star, *10 June. Actual world population: 6.5bn***

"Around 30million watched the match at home." – **Sunday Mirror, *11 June. Precise viewing figure: 11.9m***

Hammering the opposition

Britain's patriotic tabloids meanwhile were united in outrage at last week's column in the German paper *Bild* lampooning David Beckham's "trophy wife" and "porky" sister.

For the *Daily Star*, this was a "bitter attack" in a "down-market rag". A "vicious attack", the *Daily Mail* agreed. The *Sun* called it a "vile piece" in a "sleazy German newspaper". To the *Mirror* it was simply "disgraceful".

But this wasn't the first such tirade against the Beckhams. Which newspaper last year savaged them as "sulky", "sullen" and "sour-faced"? Which rag wrote of Victoria Beckham: "Everything about her is fake – the tan, the breasts, the lips, the nails, the hair"? Which has regularly taunted "stick-thin Victoria" for "doing her lady of leisure routine", and warned that if she loses any more weight "David won't be able to find her in their four-poster bed"? Which paper gleefully trashed her as a "useless wife and hopeless mother" who lacks "even the most basic social graces"?

Step forward, respectively, the *Daily Star*, *Daily Mail*, *Sun* and *Daily Mirror*. If only *Bild* could show such generosity of spirit.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

SIGNAL FAILURES

Oyster sores

THE saga of London's Oyster card shows how far the rail system has come since agile private companies, "focused on meeting customers' needs", took it out of the bureaucratic public sector.

Fed up waiting for the private sector to develop a smartcard system, Transport for London introduced Oyster smartcards in 2003 to its tube, bus and light-rail services. It had no authority over the private train operators, but as they're supposedly so focused on customer service, they'd be delighted to join in, no? Er, no. They devoted all their energy to resisting Oyster, which wasn't in their franchise contracts and needed expenditure on smartcard scanners at stations.

The stalemate lasted until TfL caved in last month, agreeing to spend £20m of public cash installing the equipment on the train firms' behalf.

Who are these train operators, too busy counting the pennies to consider whether their customers might want to use Oyster? They're owned by FirstGroup (annual turnover: £3bn), National Express (£2.2bn), Go-Ahead (£1.3bn), Stagecoach (£1.5bn) and John Laing (£400m). No wonder they refused to spend £20m on Oyster equipment – it would be a whopping 0.2 percent of their annual turnover!

ARE Scottish ministers starting to realise that giving FirstGroup their country's rail franchise wasn't such a bright idea?

"They assured us regular commuters would not lose out and they could book ahead," a spokesman for Scottish Transport Minister Tavish Scott said last week, sounding hurt and bemused by the difference between First ScotRail's words and deeds. "We will be seeking urgent clarification from First ScotRail."

FSR had presented its fare change, which banned Saver tickets in the morning peak, as providing "a better service by improving the way in which we manage our current seating capacity". In English that means: "Pricing people off the most useful trains and screwing more cash out of the remaining passengers instead of providing enough carriages to meet demand."

WorstGroup sugared the pill by saying passengers could buy cheaper book-ahead tickets to get from Dundee to Edinburgh, for example, in the morning peak – but was later forced to admit it had allocated no book-ahead seats on any Dundee-Edinburgh trains at that time.

Despite the furore, FSR won't rest on its laurels. "We plan to deliver these benefits to more routes from September," it warned.

WorstGroup isn't singling out the Scots for such "benefits". On the day it hiked Scottish fares, it also banned discounted tickets from evening-peak trains on its new First Capital Connect franchise (Thameslink and Great Northern). London Travelwatch said a Bedford-London ticket rose 89 percent. FCC said: "We anticipate that passenger numbers will be reduced, resulting in a more comfortable journey." The government, which set the terms of the franchise, must be delighted it's achieving its goal of forcing poorer people off the trains while FCC takes the flak.

FIRSTGROUP is using its eye-watering bus fares in Bristol to blackmail the city council, after the council's leader publicly urged it to cut fares.

She said the high bus fares worsened traffic congestion by deterring motorists from taking the bus. Local WorstGroup bus boss Tony Anthistle told the *Bristol Evening News* fares would only come down if the council provided the "right infrastructure" for his buses, citing Leeds as a shining example where roads had been dedicated to buses.

So how much have FirstGroup bus fares fallen in west Yorkshire since the Elite "bus quality initiative" (publicly funded bus infrastructure) went live in east Leeds in 2001? They've *risen* by 50 percent.

'Dr B Ching'

Number crunching

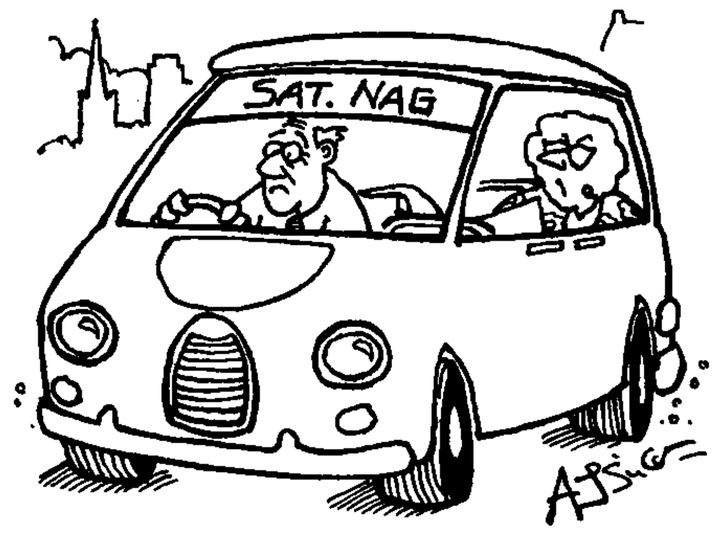
140 mph ■ Top speed promised from west-coast mainline upgrade (Euston-Glasgow)

125 mph ■ Actual top speed from £8bn upgrade

5 mph ■ Top speed at Rugby this month when the sun shone on upgraded tracks

I-SPY *London Underground*

Submitted by Dominic Tobin.



"Next left, you idiot, not right! Now we'll probably be late!"

DOING THE ROUNDS

Dump the Debt

HEALTH Secretary Patsy Hewitt is at pains to point out that the net NHS debt of £512m is about half a percent of the annual budget. So why not write it off?

The Department of Health has sent legions of turnaround teams and management consultants, at vast public expense, to many allegedly failing trusts to try to uncover gross financial mismanagement or implement further efficiency savings, and in most cases they have been unable to do so.

The bottom line is that after primary care trusts and hospitals have paid for the reforms that New Labour has lumbered them with (new contacts for consultants and GPs, Agenda for Change, PFI debts, waiting list initiatives, target payments and new policies every day), there isn't enough money left to provide a comprehensive, free-at-the-front door health service.

It would help managers if the government had a coherent strategy other than waiting for the NHS to go pear shaped and then sending in the private sector to pick over the corpse. M.D. recently attended a meeting of Kennet and North Wiltshire PCT and West Wiltshire PCT. Their combined debt for this year is £20m and they have a historical debt of £34m. The PCTs have been commendably open about their financial difficulties and proposed three options that are out for public consultation. But whichever is chosen, they don't have a hope in hell of paying off their debts this year.

The £28m indebted West Hertfordshire Hospitals trust is so desperate that it's "withdrawing from one of its hospitals" without any public consultation. Either Hemel Hempstead or St Albans will get the boot. The government hopes that when hospitals close, community services can take over; but the investment in these services should have happened at the beginning of the reform programme. Expecting PCTs to fund enough specialist staff to treat patients at home when they have huge debts is absurd.

At the very least, the government should write off historic debts that have occurred through year-on-year under-funding, not mismanagement, and give PCTs and GPs the resources and bureaucratic freedom to develop better community services. If the debt remains, PCTs and hospitals can only survive by cutting staffing to dangerously threadbare levels and refusing to pay their bills. Which is precisely what's happening at present.

Royal College of Idiots

■ M.D. resigned from the Royal College of General Practitioners, the youngest and allegedly most progressive of the royal colleges, when he observed the council clapping a mace into dinner. The naive idiocy of the college was further enhanced on 6 June when its chairman, Dr Mayur Lakhani, announced a "grading system" for GPs which was predictably reported in the *Times* as "Michelin stars for GPs". This will undoubtedly happen at some time, since the government is obsessed with reducing the complexities of health care to the simplistic bollocks of stars and league tables; but for the RCGP to be trapped into suggesting the scheme is the nadir in its press management. Two days later, it bid a hasty retreat, citing fears that the grading might be used for star ratings. The BBC reported this as "GP Michelin grade plan scrapped." But for how long?

Thought for the Day

■ A poll of 72,000 NHS workers by the Healthcare Commission found only 44 percent were happy with the standard of care where they worked. The lowest rating (24 percent) went to... West Hertfordshire Hospitals trust. Still, it looks like it won't be round for long.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

WHISTLING IN THE WIND

AFTER two gay paedophile foster parents were convicted last month of abusing boys sent to them by Wakefield council, one might have expected the city's social services department to be extra vigilant about the children in its care.

Alas, the Labour council's response, when alerted to allegations of sexual and physical abuse and drug-taking in its children's homes, was to go into denial and try to wreck the careers and reputations of staff who had blown the whistle.

Six experienced care workers lodged a formal complaint about management failures which had led to:

- Children being sexually and physically abused by other children;
- An agency worker buying cannabis with money taken from petty cash and smoking it with children supposedly in his care;
- Children as young as 12 being allowed to engage in sexual relationships;
- Violent incidents in which staff were injured because of the inappropriate placing of disturbed children.

When director of children's services Elaine McHale insisted that the allegations had been fully investigated and found to be unsubstantiated, the whistleblowers went to the local press. They were promptly sacked. McHale then tried – but failed – to have the six placed on the government register of people, such as paedophiles, unsuitable to work with children. Meanwhile Knacker is still investigating the allegations and the whistleblowers are preparing their case for reinstatement and compensation at an employment tribunal. They may bear in mind a 2002 appeal court ruling, concerning a whistleblower at Hackney council, that "there must be no sanction or prejudice imposed upon any who expose fraud and corruption" and that those who fail to deal appropriately with wrongdoing may themselves have committed an offence.

PS: Not everyone's career has suffered in the wake of the Wakefield scandal. The agency worker who shared his publicly-funded spliffs with children was allowed to resign without any action being taken against him. He is now retraining as a teacher!

● THE London Borough of Brent has climbed on the World Cup bandwagon with a special site on the council's intranet, where scores will be updated and staff can share their views on Sven's boys' march to glory on a special discussion forum.

Some killjoy members of staff believe it might be more useful to have discussion forums on work-related topics like staff management, education and efficiency, but there are no plans for any.

SLIME PAUL

LAST year we reported how Bedfordshire Tory Tarsem Paul had slimed his way on to the county council via a cynical "granny farming" exercise in which he and fellow Tories had toured old folks' homes and encouraged elderly residents, some with Alzheimer's disease, to sign away proxy votes in his favour (*Eye* 1136).

Relatives complained to the Standards Board for England, which launched an "investigation" into the conduct of Paul and fellow Tory councillor Roger Gwynne-Jones. At long last that deeply useless body has reported. It finds no action needs to be taken.

The SBE report says "there was no realistic prospect of establishing whether Cllr Paul knew or should have known that the individuals signing the forms were unaware that they were signing a proxy vote". It also concluded there was "no realistic prospect of establishing whether the councillors knew, or ought to have known, that the electors were unaware they were authorising a proxy vote". In other words the voters *were* duped, but no one is being held responsible.

As *Eye* 1136 reported, Knacker took an interest in the affair, but in December 2005 the Crown Prosecution Service judged it "impossible" to establish unlawful conduct on the part of the councillors. How so? A clue lies in the SBE report: "Most of those who signed proxy vote forms in April 2005 are now unable to give cogent evidence because of their current mental incapacity, or because they are now dead."

● LAST ISSUE we told how Newham council's parks "constabulary", who roam the borough masquerading as real policemen, had illegally detained two innocent youths in the back of a van in the neighbouring borough of Redbridge. Now the families of Kwaljit Singh, 17, and Sahmi Mohammed, 14, have applied for legal aid to sue Newham council and its Keystone Kops for false imprisonment and assault. Meanwhile, the man in charge of the gang of Knacker-impersonators has been called in by the government to be a key adviser on combating anti-social behaviour! Trevor Kennett, head of Newham's Crime and Anti-social Behaviour Service [*sic*], will be advising the Cabinet Office and the prime minister's Delivery Unit and leading "workshops" for the government's "Respect Task Force". Trevor says the government's Respect Academies "are promoting new ways to help protect communities from fear and harassment". Newham's parks police would agree – you can't have yobs going around frightening and harassing people... that's *our* job!

TEIGN SPIRIT

THE workings of the planning system, never easy to understand, are nowhere more mysterious than in Teignmouth, Devon.

Last year Frank and Joan Osborne, owners of a property at 125 Coombe Vale Road, applied to build two new homes in their large garden. However, Nick Davies, a planning officer at Teignbridge District Council, advised them that, for various reasons, planning permission would not be granted. The Osbornes and their architect had a 90-minute meeting with Davies at the end of which they believed they had surmounted all the difficulties. But when their new application was submitted, Davies said only an application for a single dwelling would be considered.

At this point, having spent £3,000 on architects' fees, the Osbornes decided enough was enough.

They sold the house and moved to Cornwall. The new owner was Gerald Tranckle, owner of a development company, Hannon Homes, and nephew of Cllr Fred Tooley, chairman of Teignmouth Town Council. Despite being aware of the previous failed applications, Tranckle wasted no time in submitting an application to build five, later amended to six, new homes in the garden of number 125.

Before Hannon's plans had been put out for public consultation, workers started demolishing outbuildings, removing trees and bushes and burning the debris. Outraged residents contacted Mr Davies at Teignbridge council and the work stopped. In early June the town council debated the proposals and heard objections from the public, although both public and press were excluded. Teignbridge council, meanwhile, approved the plans.

Confused locals, who cannot work out why two dwellings were not acceptable but six are, have asked the ombudsman to get to the bottom of the matter.

● FOOTBALL fan Bill Hodgson has been ordered to remove the crosses of St George and Union flags with which he has festooned his home in Houghton le Spring, near Sunderland. Hodgson is a tenant of the Sunderland Housing Group (SHG), which claims he is "bringing the area down". This has caused amusement in the city because SHG (motto: "Changing the Skyline") has done rather more to "bring the area down" than Hodgson and his flags. Most of the houses in his street are derelict and scheduled for demolition. The "flagged" house faces a row of boarded up homes and the rear view is over several acres of rubble. In the five years since SHG took over the city's council housing stock it has demolished some 7,000 homes while building fewer than 200. Result: a waiting list with nearly 20,000 names on it!

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

ONE of the (many) problems with schools, hospitals and so on built under the private finance initiative is that once a public body has signed a deal agreeing to pay to use the new buildings for the next 25 years, they can be royally stuffed if demand for the service then changes.

In Belfast, for example, education bosses have announced plans to close a purpose-built PFI school just two years after opening. This leaves taxpayers liable for annual payments to the construction company for the redundant building for another 23 years.

Balmoral High was part of a £17m deal announced in 2002, which also covered replacement buildings for an existing school and a teacher training unit. Right in the middle of exams, staff and pupils were told that their LEA is now throwing in the towel due to poor enrolments.

Although the school has a gym and fitness suite, Astroturf pitches, a pottery and technology suite, last year's first-year intake was just 23 pupils, rather than the predicted 100. With falling birth rates and competition from nearby schools, it is believed that the school would never have the 500 pupils needed to be viable.

So far there are no official figures on how much the debacle will cost, but local media predict that by 2029, construction company Northwin will have been paid £60m for a ghost school.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

RIGHT, KIDS, EVERYONE OUT!
CLEAR THE SANDPIT!
MY GOODNESS, WHAT'S HAPPENING? BROKEN GLASS? IS THERE A PIT BULL ON THE LOOSE?
NO – OUR BOULES GRUDGE MATCH HAS REACHED BOILING POINT
IT COULD GET UGLY! LA VENGEANCE EST UN PLAT QUI SE MANGE FROID!!!

NOOKS and CORNERS

OUR elected representatives may, on the whole, care little for historic buildings [*Eyes passim ad nauseam*], but others do. Witness a wonderful row in the ancient, beautiful and well-heeled Gloucestershire town of Cirencester over a proposed piece of asset-stripping by the town council.

Forty years ago, the Chester-Master family gave the so-called Saxon Arch, a medieval gatehouse, to the town. The town, short of a bit of cash apparently, now wants to flog it.

The Norman Arch, as it is more accurately called, is the only surviving fragment of the Augustinian Abbey of St Mary, founded in the reign of Henry I. The Spital Gate, with its round arched entrance, now a grade I listed building, was built around 1180. In 1964, Cllr Richard Chester-Master – descendant of Queen Elizabeth's physician, Dr Richard Master, who had bought the abbey lands in 1564 – offered the historic structure to the town in memory of his late father, Colonel Chester-Master.

Minutes record that Cirencester Urban District Council unanimously resolved to accept the gift, and that the vice-chairman stated: "It now seemed certain that the Abbey grounds would largely be preserved for the town for all time." But "for all time" means little to the narrow-minded councillors who now control Cirencester Town Council.

The Norman Arch was occupied by council staff after 1974. In 2001 it was empty but the following year the artist Joanna Walker offered to rent the building. Then, in 2005, she was told her tenancy would not be renewed as the council had decided to "market the property." This decision met with the strong opposition of Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society and the Cirencester Civic Society. In a poll by the *Wilts & Gloucestershire Standard*, 96 percent of locals were opposed to the sale too. A petition urging the council to reconsider was signed by more than 4,000.

But the council has remained adamant. The town clerk, Andrew Crook, argued that a private owner could invest more money in the building and that the sale would generate money for other projects and services. What these might be was not revealed until August 2005, when the council suddenly claimed it was needed to make playing fields conform to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Meanwhile, in July the Norman Arch Group had been formed and the strength of public opinion was clear at a council meeting held on 11 August when – amid rowdy scenes unparalleled in the recent history of this genteel town – several protestors were escorted from the room by the local bobby. These included Will Chester-Master, whose father had entrusted this medieval treasure to the council (and surely, if the council no longer wants the arch, it should give it back to his family?) At a public meeting on 23 August, a huge majority endorsed the motions that the sale was "morally wrong" and should be stopped pending more talks.

But the council seems to have nothing but contempt for public opinion and remains determined to sell the Norman Arch. It was on the market for £350,000, which would contribute little to the council's budget (although far more than is needed to upgrade three playing fields). Both the Landmark Trust and the Vivat Trust – organisations experienced in making good use of historic buildings – have offered to lease the arch from the council, but the councillors aren't interested. They also resolved *not* to support an application for a lottery grant. The attitude of this dogmatic and philistine council is succinctly expressed by the head of finance, Robin Bourne (Con), who wrote: "It may have some esoteric value for a minority, but for the town's council tax payers it is more a liability than an asset… This councillor believes we have a duty to use the resources we have for the benefit of today's townspeople, not yesterday's."

The idea that, in a rich place like Cirencester, people might take a pride in history and regard the selling of a gift as a betrayal of trust and responsibility is, of course, incomprehensible to him. Money is all. Such, I fear, is the damage done to our civilisation by Mrs Thatcher and now by Mr Blair.

IN Eye 1121 I discussed the unpopular plans by Messrs Waitrose to massively enlarge its supermarket in the centre of Marlow, Bucks, and concluded by asking: "Will Wycombe Council have the guts to say no to Waitrose? Most unlikely." I am happy to report that I was wrong and the councillors rejected the plan in September.

Now Waitrose has submitted a new application which is virtually identical to the last and still requires the demolition of a listed façade and the acquisition of a neighbouring site. On 6 June a parish referendum asked: "Is it in the compelling public interest that Wycombe District Council should execute a Compulsory Purchase Order to expropriate land… to enable Waitrose to build a new superstore in Marlow?" Of those who voted, 93 percent think it is not. Can mere democracy stand up to the arrogance of the supermarket chain? We shall see.

'Piloti'

CONCRETE PROPOSALS

IF YOU thought planning policy was a mess under John Prescott, with acres of recoverable housing across the north of England identified for bulldozing, now that he's gone things could actually be about to become a lot worse.

The Treasury – which believes the planning system is too restrictive and damages Britain's international competitiveness (responding to lobbying by big business and organisations like the CBI) – wants to open up swathes of farmland in the south-east for development, clearing the way for vast amounts of new housing (irrespective of quality or design) and a more competitive retail environment (ie more retail sheds).

Planning, of course, is anathema to free-market economists. And to judge by Gordon Brown's recent speech to the CBI, it's clear they have his ear. As he told them: "We must make our system quicker, more flexible and more responsive… we have already legislated to make major changes but there is much more to do."

With Prescott gone, there is now no one to oppose such gung-ho views at the top. Brownite Ruth Kelly cut her teeth at the Treasury and is an economist by training; as is her junior planning minister Yvette Cooper (who incidentally is married to Brown's former right-hand man, Ed Balls). To cap it all, the Treasury has commissioned Kate Barker – a former CBI chief economist – to study how the planning system is affecting competitiveness and how it can be "improved".

Brown has a record of implementing Barker's conclusions without question – not least those of her report on housing last year, which called for thousands of new homes to be built across the south-east to solve the housing crisis (although he still refuses to exempt property refurbishment from VAT, to equalise it with new build property, which would be a quick fix for the market).

In his recent speech Brown said that Barker would "set out the challenges we face to which I can say we will rise". Planning officials are already rumoured to be horrified by the sweeping liberalisations that her team, composed almost entirely of economists, will propose.

It's not entirely clear why Barker should preside over such a review. She was the CBI's chief economist for seven years, from 1994 to 2001, and the CBI has consistently lobbied against *any* restriction being placed on business by the planning system. Or maybe that explains it.

So prepare for a return to the days of early Thatcherism, when Nick Ridley presided over a laissez-faire system which saw Bluewater, Meadowhall and a host of smaller but equally badly planned office and retail parks and red-brick Barratt boxes scarring the British landscape.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

This sort of thing makes the Royal Academy a laughing stock.
SCULPTOR'S EMPTY PLINTH ACCEPTED FOR SUMMER EXHIBITION–BUT THE WORK MEANT TO STAND ON IT TURNED DOWN!
It's far too elaborate to be a serious minimalist piece!
That bit of wood's way over the top.

Seiko Oxford Pocket Thesuarus, Crossword Solver and Spellchecker

Only £19.99 (inc. p&p)

Sunday Life reader offer

Letters

Lookalike

The Scream

The Trophy

Sir,

Could you re-print that marvellous lookalike from a few years back showing the remarkable resemblance between the World Cup trophy and Munch's 'The Scream'? I think we should be told again.

Yours,
K.E. HUGHES,

Prague.

Second opinion

Sir,

So M.D. (Doing the Rounds, Eye 1160) reckons that surgery cannot be subjected to clinical trials "since any surgeon worth his salt knows if he is performing a proper or sham operation". In the same way that any physician worth his salt knows whether his treatments work, perhaps? Surely in both cases the whole point is to examine outcomes. But then in the very next sentence M.D. goes on to give an example of a "sham" operation which surgeons have been doing uncritically for years! Does M.D. know his arse from his elbow? (And, if he is a surgeon, I think we should definitely be told!)

DAFYDD LEWIS,

Via email.

Wholly father

Sir,

The cartoon "Why Jesus would never have married and had children" (Eye 1159) is surely a few squillion cubits off target. The Gospel record indicates that Jesus, had he so chosen, would actually have made a great hands-on Dad because a) unlike his disciples, he positively welcomed the company of small children (Suffer the children to come unto me) and b) someone who touched lepers and washed 12 pairs of smelly feet in succession is hardly likely to have a problem with nappies. But I was forgetting – this is Private Eye, one of the last refuges of primitive misogyny and female stereotyping. Dan Brown picked the wrong target.

J. PEARCE,

Via email.

Chernobyl legacy

Sir,

Dr Rob Johnston tells us that UNSCEAR has the number of genetic abnormalities/ congenital birth defects resulting from Chernobyl at zero.

On page 16-17 of the New Internationalist No 382 there are pictures taken in Novinski Asylum, Minsk, and Children's Home No 1, Minsk which show a few of the children who have, through the "legacy" of Chernobyl, a "horrifying and bewildering array of afflictions. Some children are born brain-damaged, others have genetic, physiological, neurological and psychological damage".

There is nothing "lovely, cuddly, warm and fuzzy" about nuclear power.

Maybe Dr Johnston can tell us how UNSCEAR dismissed Chernobyl as a cause of the suffering in places such as the institutions in Minsk.

Yours faithfully,
DEREK ROBERTSON,

Via email.

Final journey

Sir,

Your reference to the circumstances of the sad death of John Denver in 1997 (Ad Nauseam, Eye 1160) was inaccurate. Rather than the aircraft that Denver was piloting just "running out of fuel and falling out of the sky into the sea", what actually happened was that due to an inherent design-fault involving the pilot needing to turn their body in their seat to operate a switch to change fuel tanks, the design fault also involved the pilot inadvertently making an involuntary major change to the rudder settings with their shoulder. As a result a catastrophic change of direction occurred and was non-reversible. This design fault was corrected on these aircraft, but only after Denver's death.

MARTIN GARVEY,

Via email.

Fresh dates

Sir,

The Battle of Kosovo Polje was not on June 15, 1389, but on June 28. That is why the Serbs regard June 28, St Vitus' Day (Vidovdan), as their sacred day.

When the archduke Franz Ferdinand visited Sarajevo on this day in 1914, A.J.P. Taylor remarked later that it was as if a member of the British Royal Family had visited Dublin on St Patrick's Day at the height of the Troubles. June 28 was the day in 1921 when the first Yugoslav Constitution became law, which was why it was called the Vidovdan Constitution. June 28 was also the day in 1948 when Stalin threw Tito out of the Cominform.

Finally, it was on June 28, 2001 when Slobodan Milosevic was extradited to the Hague.

Yours sincerely,
TOM CARTER,

Somerton, Somerset.

Scenes You Seldom See

England's fans celebrate qualifying by dining quietly in many of the charming restaurants dotted around the city

Right tracks

Sir,

Here in Croydon we have a fairly complementary mix of buses and trams. If lessons are to be learnt from this daily experience, they are:

Where buses run parallel to trams, in spite of public voices against the tram, the public vote with their "feet" and the bus service is withdrawn.

Trams are "efficient" because they have their own separate tracks – hence reliability. The same money as the Tramlink cost would buy many times the distance for dedicated bus-lanes.

Since the arrival of the driver-only concept (applied to both bus and tram systems) the design of both has stood still. Coventry University (for one) has produced a new bus design. It and all others have been rejected in favour of the totally unsuitable "bendy-buses".

The real solution, therefore, is dedicated tracks for public transport allied to the flexibility of a new, clean and economical bus design. Bus lanes are neither one thing nor the other. Trams produce as much filth as buses but at the power station.

There is a crying need for an iota of originality and management courage in the provision of good public transport.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN PRESTON,

South Croydon.

Campbell dynasty

Sir,

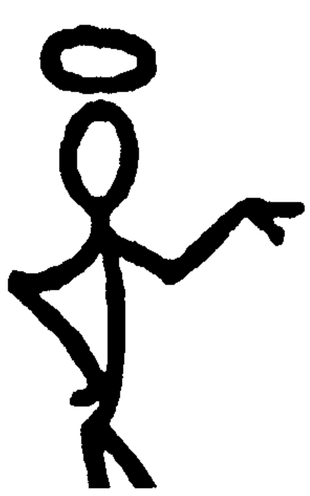
How clever of the Chinese to name an under-powered lightbulb after the leader of the Lib Dems.

Could they also tell us how long it will take to change him?

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL BEGG,

Cyprus.

Lookalike



Sir,

Have you noticed the marked similarity between Croucho of the robot dance, Leslie Charteris's "The Saint" and Egon Schiele's self-portrait of 1909? There could be a copyright issue here.

IAN BRISTOL, Via email

JULIAN BARNES, London NW5.

Hay on Wye oh Wye

Sir,

I usually have a very high regard for your exposure of various underhand tactics. However, you say that it is "an astonishing coincidence" that Maya and Alix Hattenstone are the daughters of Simon Hattenstone, suggesting that it was never mentioned in the article. It was clearly mentioned that they were his offspring and I feel you could've filled the space with something better from Hay (preferably something nasty about Hitchens).

RODDIE BELL,

East Lothian.

Cornish pasting

Sir,

Before MI6 got at it, my letter in Eye 1160 ran as follows:

"Your piece complaining about the £600,000 of taxpayers' money being spent on developing the Cornish language (Brussels Sprouts, Eye 1159), might have been more balanced if you had also told us how much has been spent on teaching Cornish children about their own culture over the years (a sum not unadjacent to zero), and how much Cornish taxpayers have had to fork out to fund the indoctrination of their own children in a foreign culture."

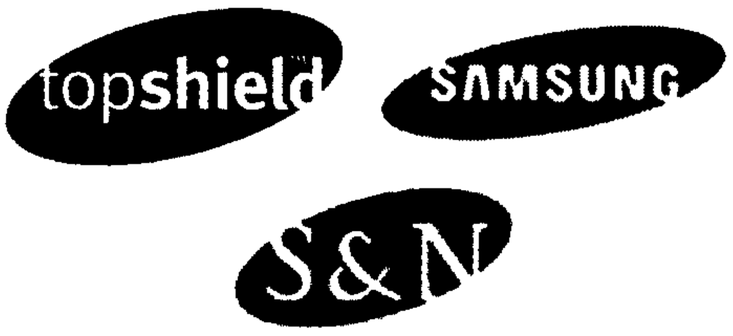
Some of us write English too, you know!

Oll an gwella,
BRENDAN MCMAHON,
Derbyshire.

• Apologies for the glitch which removed some words from Mr McMahon's letter last issue. Ed.

"Can I borrow a cup of water?"

Lookalike



Sir,

Could the creative geniuses behind the logos for Samsung and Forbo SA's "topshield" perhaps have been influenced by the equally inspiring corporate symbol of the "brand-driven, beer-led drinks business" Scottish & Newcastle? Or vice versa?

Yours sincerely,
DAVID JACKSON YOUNG,
Edinburgh.

Taxing read

Sir,

Fascinated to read your piece ("Green Wings", Eye 1160) in which The Australian newspaper reveals all about Beardie Branson's tax schemes. This wouldn't be The Australian owned by the old tax dodger himself, R. Murdoch, by any chance? Branson is a mere child in the game compared to the Dirty Digger, but then that's probably not a comparison they cared to make in print...

All power to your organ.

JAMES PICKETT,
Isle of Wight.

Poor show, Piloti

Sir,

Having recently visited Sir William Turner's Hospital at Kirkleatham, I can agree with Piloti (Eye 1160) that this is one of the finest groups of classic historic buildings in England; but, apart from that, his remarks are a load of half-baked piffle.

To characterise the trustees (or Mr Sotheran) as somehow grasping or avaricious is to malign a hard-working group of dedicated volunteers. They still run the hospital as a fine residence for the elderly, in accordance with the wishes of its founder, and have sympathetically brought the facilities up to date without damaging the character of the buildings. The chapel gives them a great problem. Not being open for public worship, it gets no ecclesiastical funding, nor has it so far qualified for Heritage Lottery Grants.

The sale of the chairs and the chandelier has been forced on the trustees by the Charity Commission (and is nothing to do with the whim of Mr Sotheran) which has insisted that any expenditure by the foundation to maintain and insure them would not be in accordance with their charitable objectives. So, they too have to be sold. The figure you give for the insurance premium is way too low! The district planning authority has yet to rule on whether it is a fixture or not, which seems to hinge on whether it is hung from the ceiling on a hook or a ring!

Yours,
CHRIS PURSER,
Thirsk, N. Yorks.

WorldCupBalls

£10 paid for contributions

"He's very quick for a man of his age. I suppose you'd call him ageless. He's 33 or 34."
DAVID PLEAT
(Adrian Sinclair)

"If we do win this one it won't be a bad thing."
GARETH SOUTHGATE
(Adam Cannon)

"I think the big guns will come to the boil."
JIMMY ARMFIELD, Radio 5 Live
(Stuart Taylor)

"A deflection – that's what changed the course of the ball."
JIM BEGLIN, ITV1
(Martin Naughton)

"That's their tactic here – don't get beaten."
MICK McCARTHY, BBC1
(Dominic Pflaum)

"There's a real international flavour to this World Cup."
JIMMY ARMFIELD, Radio 5 Live
(Harvey McGavin)

BBC Reporter: *Ten minutes before the game you did not know you were playing. When did you find out you were?*
Shaka Hislop: *Ten minutes before the game.*
(Tony A. Dallman)

"... and Christian Ronaldo has hit the ball with every inch of his body weight!"
ALAN DARK
(Geoff Knights)

"You need at least eight or nine men in a ten-man wall."
MARK LAWRENSON
(Richard Biscoe)

"He knows all about the Italian opposition, playing now in Turkey..."
JOHN MOTSON
(A. Stepney)

SOLUTIONS

"House of Flags: Fabric Display Solutions" – *flags*

"BHS Body Solutions" – *underwear*

"John Lewis Cool Solutions: refreshing solutions for cooling, creating and chilling" –*fridges*

"Velux Daylighting Solutions" – *skylights*

"Forest, the UK's largest manufacturer of timber design solutions" – *sheds*

"Paintswift Innovative Solutions: Interior and Exterior Decorative Design Solutions" – *decorators*

All submitted by readers

Pseud cornered

Sir,

Thank you for the honour of quoting my work in Pseuds Corner (Eye 1160). When, three years ago, you failed to pick up on my piece in the Observer comparing Albert Camus' existential retelling of the Myth of Sisyphus with Tim Henman's Wimbledon exploits, I feared nothing I could write would ever be enough to earn me this coveted accolade.

JULIAN BAGGINI,
Via email.

Cottoning on

Sir,

I wish to point out a very grievous and serious error in the latest issue of Private Eye. In Graham Rennie's letter concerning Dot Branning, he adds, in brackets, "née Cotton". Cotton was, of course, her first married name, not her single name. I hope you can correct this error in the next issue.

Yours faithfully,
NORMAN JACOBS,
Clacton-on-Sea.

Cross words

Sir,

I think it's quite right that you often use your organ to voice your deploration of Desmond's highly conspicuous Asian-babe-big-knockers-and-bums vileness. It could be argued, though, that the smut in your magazine is neatly contained within your crossword, and thus intellectualised and rendered cryptic? But it's still – unnecessarily? – there. So why don't you publish a crossword for those who are* ***not*** *obsessed, in a schoolboyish way, with sexual matters?*

When you do, I'll buy your magazine again. Till then – grow up.

Yours,
ADRIAN MANN,
Doncaster.

(Snigger bloody snigger? Probably.)*

Photo opportunity

Sir,

Do you happen to have a photo, of two people perhaps, in which, however small it's printed, they are always recognisable?

JIM WATTS,
Moray.

Letter from **Berlin**

from Our Own Correspondent

WE promised the world a warm welcome for our festival of footballing fun, but the façade is already beginning to crack.

It is not the well-justified fears of sun-fried bald-headed fatties over from England intent on drinking their own body weight in lager that is causing concern. It's our people – and not simply the eccentric Bavarian farmer who obtained a court injunction prohibiting fans camping within earshot of his heifers.

England supporters, we understand, have been encouraged to drop old-fashioned chants inspired by events of the 1940s. At least when England fans do mock Nazi salutes, they are (in the main) being ironic. But some of our own young people have shown no such reticence or irony when breaking all taboos and lauding Adolf themselves.

From the moment a German citizen of Ethiopian origin was pounded to a pulp in Potsdam, the momentum of the attacks began to mount. Even before the brutal attack on Mr Ermyas, many foreign residents in the former eastern Germany – and some Germans, too – were more than a little sceptical about the official pronouncements of goodwill and tolerance to all men.

There is more than a whiff of resentment in cities such as Leipzig, for example, a World Cup host city, at the money being lavished on hosting the tournament. Leipzig, of course, is where in 2001 Indian computer experts were set upon with attack dogs outside the main train station, having foolishly responded to a government advert placed in the Indian media calling for specialists to flock to the town.

While such provincial mean-spiritedness does not generally extend to the nation's capital, Berlin is still very much a divided city, and some of those in the dilapidated far-eastern quarters of the capital parrot similar sentiments. Despite all the claims incessantly pumped out by PR agencies to the contrary, a great swathe of Berlin's population has never benefited from the city's supposed economic renaissance since reunification. Attacks on foreigners are not infrequent, and various far-right rabble-rousers regularly foment seething disquiet.

It was not too far from here, in late May at Lichtenberg, that the German politician Giyasettin Sayan was savagely set about, for being "a dirty Turk" and having his face slashed with a smashed bottle in the process.

Travelling non-white football fans who are the target of an official leaflet campaign to warn them of the dangers of straying off the beaten track – into areas where they might receive less than a cordial welcome – might wrongly conclude that they are the potential victims of a hate campaign specific to the World Cup. This is, of course, the government line. It is equally nonsense. The agent-provocateurs of the far-right NPD are always there, in the shadows, mouthing off at the various "Lokals" in the rundown quarters of the city, or keeping watch in the ticket halls of the "Hauptbahnhofe" of provincial towns, for the stray black African asylum seeker whom they can pick off.

The World Cup is our showcase, a symbol of the new Europe that is allegedly being built for a fairer, more prosperous future for all. That, at least, is what our mainstream politicians and business leaders say they believe in. But it is an illusion that masks vicious tensions and sharp resentment, particularly in the east. It is also an illusion that will require brilliance and luck to survive a whole hot month in the spotlight.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Anal massage is not a recognised medical procedure," a council spokesman in Nord-Tröndelag (Norway) told reporters, "and we cannot condone its use by doctors. It is a controversial technique, and although Dr Nordfors claims it can cure various kinds of pain, there is no proof that this is so. Our enquiries have revealed that he has been warned not to use anal massage on at least three occasions by the Swedish Medical Responsibility Board, and that he was dismissed last year by another Norwegian local authority for the same reason. Under the circumstances, and given the negative publicity surrounding his conduct, we regret that we have no option but to sack him immediately."

Speaking after his dismissal, the forty-seven-year-old Swedish-born Doctor Mikael Nordfors defended his unusual method of administering pain relief, claiming that "this is part of a witch hunt against me, by people who do not want to admit that my technique is successful. When I worked in Stockholm, I cured an elderly woman's headaches and back pain by administering anal massage, internally with my index finger, yet I was censured by the authorities. My method works, but I have been grossly misunderstood. True, I have sometimes made it impossible for myself within the healthcare sector, because I sometimes behave childishly. I am different from other doctors. I am a genius and much much cleverer than they are. Actually, I have a personality disorder, or rather a syndrome, a form of Aspergers, just like Bill Gates, Harpo Marx, or Einstein, for example. But believe me. My anal massage can cure your pain." *(The Local [Sweden], 4/4/06. Spotter: Darren Ingram)*

– ● –

● *Dear Woman, May you a happy International Women's Day!*

Thanks for your heartthrob resembles the water, for your tender word, for your devote to the human multiply, for the sacrifice to support the man. You are not only for work hard in the daytime also, but do the housework in the evening excellent. You have prop up the half sky with your effeminate shoulder.

If on the occasion of the International Women's Day, saying 'you are tired, and may you a happy International Women's Day' from my bottom of the heart, also wish you health and beautiful forever.

Yours lovely.

All women that dinner in the Larruping Bay Chinese Restaurant should enjoy 12 percent discount and one complimentary glass of fresh fruit juice on March 8. (Government hotel booklet, "Colorful Seaside 2006", Xiamen, S.E. China. Spotter: Richard J. Daly)

– ● –

● "People are amazed when I tell them that every child in this school can write simultaneously with both hands in two different languages," Virangat Sharma told reporters at the Veena Vadini school in Madhya Pradesh, "but I don't know why. Ever since the school opened in 1999, we have been teaching ambidexterity to all our little students, and they soon learn to use both hands with equal ease. Move among them and watch them work, and you'll see how easy it is. They don't even realise that they're doing anything unusual."

Principal Sharma had invited the press to the village of Singrauli to witness the writing skills of his seventy-two students, all aged between four and eight. "I first became interested in ambidexterity when I read that India's first President, Dr Rajendra Prasad, used to write in two languages at the same

time. I was impressed, so I taught myself to do it, then experimented with developing such a skill among my students. The children are taught six languages – Hindi, Urdu, English, Roman, Sanskrit, and Arabic – and they can write on their writing slates in any two you care to mention, at the same time. Oh, and they also know the world's capital cities, and their times tables up to a hundred, but people don't seem quite so impressed by that as by the two-handed writing." *(New Karala [India], 7/3/06. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And there's obviously only one subject that can be the theme of my message to you all this week.

Can any of the children tell me what that might be?

That's right, Asbo! It's the World Cup!

And isn't it wonderful to have something that draws us all together as one great big family!

Is there anything else which can unite us all as a community – young and old, men and women, black and white, gays and straights, rich and not-quite-so-rich-but-getting-better-off-all-the-time!?

Yes, for a whole month, we can put aside our differences and sit down together in fellowship in front of the big screen.

And, hey, as we're all sitting there sharing our crisps and lager, doesn't that remind us of something? Of a similar sharing-type event involving bread and wine? Think about it!

And here's something else that I want to share with you at this happy time of celebration. Isn't it marvellous to see everyone rallying round and supporting "the team"?

Not sneering from the sidelines, or muttering about the players, but giving 101 percent backing to the guys who represent them!

And above all, of course, they are right behind the most important person on the field – the captain!

Do you see what I'm getting at? The skipper, the leader, the man in charge is rightly looked up to as someone who deserves total respect and loyalty!

Are you getting the picture, everybody? Can you think of someone else who plays a similar role in charge of the "squad"?

Someone else whose name begins with "B"? No, Rashid, not Mr Brown!

I mean someone who's popular, fit, attractive, brim-full of energy, and who has a beautiful, glamorous wife who has a career in her own right and loves to go

shopping!

Got it now? Hey, I don't want to press the parallel too far, but wouldn't it be great if *this* captain could expect the same kind of undivided loyalty from his followers as Mr Beckham?

Particularly when he has already won the equivalent of three World Cups!

Not even Mr Beckham can boast that!

And, I don't want to get too personal here, but can I remind you that in all my years leading this parish, I have never once been "sent off" or been caught "playing away".

So, wouldn't it be nice to hear the chant echoing round the parish, "Come on, Vicar!"

And, while we are on the theme of the World Cup, can I quote the immortal words of St Kenneth of Wolstenholme – "They think it's all over – but it isn't because the Vicar's still here!".

That should give everyone something to think about while they're watching the football (especially Gordon!).

Yours,

Tony

The vicar captains his winning team! As seen by Mr De La Nougerede

WORLD KUP KORNER!!

The Vicar's "fantasy side" that puts St Albion's on top of the world!

Tony Blair

Anthony Blair **Rev. A.R.P. Blair**

Blair T. **Blair A.** **Mr Blair**

Blair **Tony B.** **Tone** **The Vicar** **Me**

A MESSAGE FROM THE VICAR'S WIFE

There's been a lot of silly gossip around the parish about my recent trip to Malaysia. For the record, I was not told to leave the courtroom. It was entirely my decision to sit outside so that I could hear proceedings better. Nor was I improperly dressed. I just didn't happen to have the right clothes on. Nor do I in any way mind having to forego my £500,000 fee. That was not my reason for visiting Malaysia. My sole purpose in going was to see the countryside and to do some shopping. I would inform anyone who continues to spread these vile and outrageous libels that they will be answerable in the Malaysian Courts – where the penalty for insulting the Vicar's wife is death. You have been warned!

Cherie Booth QC, The Vicarage.

Congratulations!!!

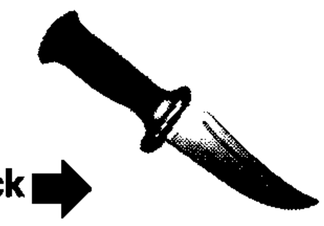
To Miss Gilbert on her appointment as Chief Inspector of the St Albion's Kwikfit Beacon of Excellence Technology City Academy. Christine is well worth every penny of her £225,000-a-year salary! And of course she is better known to some of you as the wife of Tony McNulty, a respected member of the PCC and our Neighbourhood Watch team. It's good to see that talent runs in the family!

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

Special Amnesty Offer

The PCC is increasingly concerned about the number of knives that are being sharpened and we are very worried about the possibility of a back-stabbing incident later this year. We know who the people are who want to use these knives, but we are willing to offer them a last chance to hand them in before there is any blood on the carpet. So come on, everybody – hand in those knives before someone gets hurt, ie the vicar.

The type of knife that could well be used to stab the vicar in the back



CALLING ALL DADS!!!

Mrs Hewitt would like everyone in the parish to read a new leaflet she has produced, entitled "Do's and Don'ts For the Dads of Today", available from the back of the church at only £1 for 100 copies!

Do's

- Do be a 'good Dad' like Tony!
- Do give Mum lots of time for her high-flying career in Malaysia, while you stay at home looking after the baby!

Don'ts

- Don't have affairs with your secretary (like Mr Prescott!).
- Don't have love children (like Mr Blunkett!).
- Don't leave becoming a Dad too late, (like Mr Brown!) or you might end up looking very silly, playing football and listening to the Arctic Monkeys.
- Don't go on about what a great Dad you are because you spend more time with your family nowadays (like Mr Milburn!) because no one will believe you and you're not really as good a Dad as the vicar anyway!

Thanks, Patricia! T.B.

KNACKER HONOURED IN QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY SHOCKER

by Our Honours Staff **Lunchtime O'BE**

CONTROVERSIAL police chief Inspector Knacker of the Yard is to be given a top honour in the Queen's Birthday List for services to the firearms industry.

Following a tip-off in the newspapers, 250 officers will go to Buckingham Palace at dawn later this month and will search the Palace for the alleged honour.

During the raid, various members of the Royal household will be accidentally shot for coming downstairs wearing "suspiciously bulky" dressing gowns.

Said a spokesman for the Queen, "Look, sometimes we get these honours wrong and give them to the wrong man. But we had reliable information that Inspector Knacker deserved this honour and we had no choice but to act on it. Imagine the outcry if we had done nothing, and then Knacker had turned out to be a competent policeman."

Said Inspector Knacker, "This is the trigger-happiest day of my life."

Inspector Knacker was honoured in a list which included:

● **Dame Esther Rantzen**, for services to ballroom dancing and the dentistry industry.

● **Sir Rolf Harris**, for services to the didgeridoo.

● **Sir Philip Greed**, for services to the tax avoidance industry.

● **Sir Stelios Easy Honour,** for cut-price services to the airport that's a two-hour coach journey from where you want to go *(cancelled)*.

There were also special secret honours for the following non-British figures who played a key role in the nation's life:

● **Wiley Fastbuck**, boss of the huge Fastbuck Corporation, who won a billion-pound contract for rebuilding Iraq. His motto ("I'm cleaning up") endeared him to both President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair.

● **General Arnie Z. Buttkicker**, US Army, devisor of "Operation Shocking And Awful", which resulted in the deaths of thousands of US soldiers and rather more Iraqis.

● **President George Bush**, American comedian who kept the US troops laughing throughout the dark days of the Iraq war and *(That's enough American honours. Ed.)*

"Lot 102 – Viscount Linley's own grandmother"

IS THIS EVIL MAN LIVING NEAR YOU?

UNDER new Home Office guidelines, worried parents will be entitled to know if Dr John Reid is at large in their vicinity.

Under the so-called "John's Law", parents can apply to the Home Office to find out the exact whereabouts of the man known as "Reido".

Reido has had a string of aliases (Secretary of State for Education, Defence, Health etc) and has kept constantly on the move in the last few years, making him difficult to track.

Reido has a psychological compulsion to interfere with the law and has recently attacked a number of innocent judges.

Said Mr Justice Cocklecarrot, "No judge is safe whilst this man is at large. The public has a right to know if Reido is lurking round the corner, ready to jump out and make new laws."

Is Reido living in your street? Let us know by contacting our website at once – www.reidophile.con.

BLAIR'S SECRET PAST – NEW SHOCK

That Blair Letter To Michael Foot In Full

IN 1982 the young Tony Blair sat down and wrote a 900-page letter to the then Labour leader, Michael Foot. The letter was carefully preserved in a dustbin for 25 years and has only now come to light when it was found on a rubbish tip in Hampstead. Now read on...

Dear Mr Foot,

It was a great privilege and honour to meet you and to be given a copy of your marvellous and brilliant book *My Heroes*. It was fascinating to read about all these people you know so much about. Nye Hazlitt, Tom Bevan, Jim Payne and, of course, Dave Spart. Wow! Socialism! It really blew my mind. And what about Karl Marx! What a beard! What a guy! You know, reading your book really made me think that these cool men might be onto something important.

You know, I agree with everything that Marx says, and also what you say about Marx and also what he says about you... *(The letter continues in a similar vein for over 20,000 words before reaching its conclusion...)* In short, Mr Foot, sir, your brilliant and wonderful book has really made me think about all kinds of things, but principally about how much I would like to be given a winnable seat so that I can get into power and destroy the Labour Party. Only joking, Mr Foot, sir!

Yours,

Comrade Tony Blair

FORESTGATE-GATE – WORLD EXCLUSIVE!!!

PRIVATE EYE has obtained a copy of the top secret intelligence report that led the Metropolitan Police to launch the most daring night-time raid in the history of crime.

It was this astonishing top-secret background briefing note that led Sir Ian Blair and his colleagues to believe that they had no alternative but to cock it up.

"Better to be sorry than safe," said Sir Ian, "although, of course, we are in no way sorry, because we haven't done anything wrong."

THAT MI5 INTELLIGENCE DOSSIER IN FULL

To: M

From: C

For Your Eyes Only

1. A senior agent, codenamed 'Broadsword', was contacted on 4 March 2006 by a trusted informer in the Islamicist community, codenamed 'Danny Boy'.

2. 'Danny Boy' communicated to 'Broadsword' the essentials of a conversation he had overheard on a No. 94 bus running between Ilford Broadway and Forest Gate, East London.

3. The conversation between the two parties in question ran as follows:

Passenger A: You know those two brothers who live at No. 47?

Passenger B: No.

Passenger A: You know, the ones with the bald heads and the funny beards?

Passenger B: Oh, yeah.

Passenger A: They're weird, aren't they? Those beards, they somehow don't look right, do they? Do you think they're stuck on?

4. When this information was processed by senior analysts of the Anti-Terrorism Unit, the following conclusion was drawn:

5. Two highly dangerous Muslim terrorists were disguising themselves with false beards, whilst operating an Al Qaeda-style cell in Leytonstone, probably producing chemical weapons in the form of explosive underwear capable of wiping out the population of London five times over within 45 minutes.

6. It was further thought possible that the two men might well be in the course of constructing a full-scale nuclear bomb, with plutonium acquired from eBay.

7. Computer modelling of the two men suggested that the two men could well be a Mr Osama bin Laden and the late Ayatollah Khomeini.

8. In the light of the above evidence, we recommend that an immediate full-scale emergency operation should be mounted to surround the address in question with 5,000 armed men, properly protected with chemical and biological warfare suits, in order to apprehend these highly dangerous terrorist masterminds – ie, the men with beards.

9. For security reasons, we recommend that the community should not be alerted to the danger by evacuating them to a safe distance from the site of the likely nuclear/chemical explosion, ie 200 kilometres.

10. For operational reasons, agent 'Danny Boy' has gone into hiding and cannot be contacted to confirm any of his evidence, but 'Broadsword' says that he is "not a bad chap for a towelhead".

"Melanoma... it's foreign – we got it from a travel magazine"

'I AM TOTALLY BEHIND BLAIR', SAYS BLAIR

by Our Political Staff **Pollyanna Toynbee**

THE Prime Minister last night pledged "101 per cent support" for the beleaguered Tony Blair.

"Mr Blair," he said, "has a very difficult job to do and he has been the most brilliant prime minister this country has ever had.

"He has been an invaluable ally in the global war against terrorism, and his decision to make the country's security his top priority cannot be faulted.

"Even if there is not a single other person in the country who supports him," said Mr Blair, "I still maintain that I should stay on forever, to ensure the survival of our civilisation."

DO YOU LOOK UNDER 21?
DON'T BE OFFENDED IF WE ASK FOR PROOF OF AGE
DO YOU LOOK LIKE A TERRORIST?
DON'T BE OFFENDED IF WE SHOOT YOU
K.J.Lamb

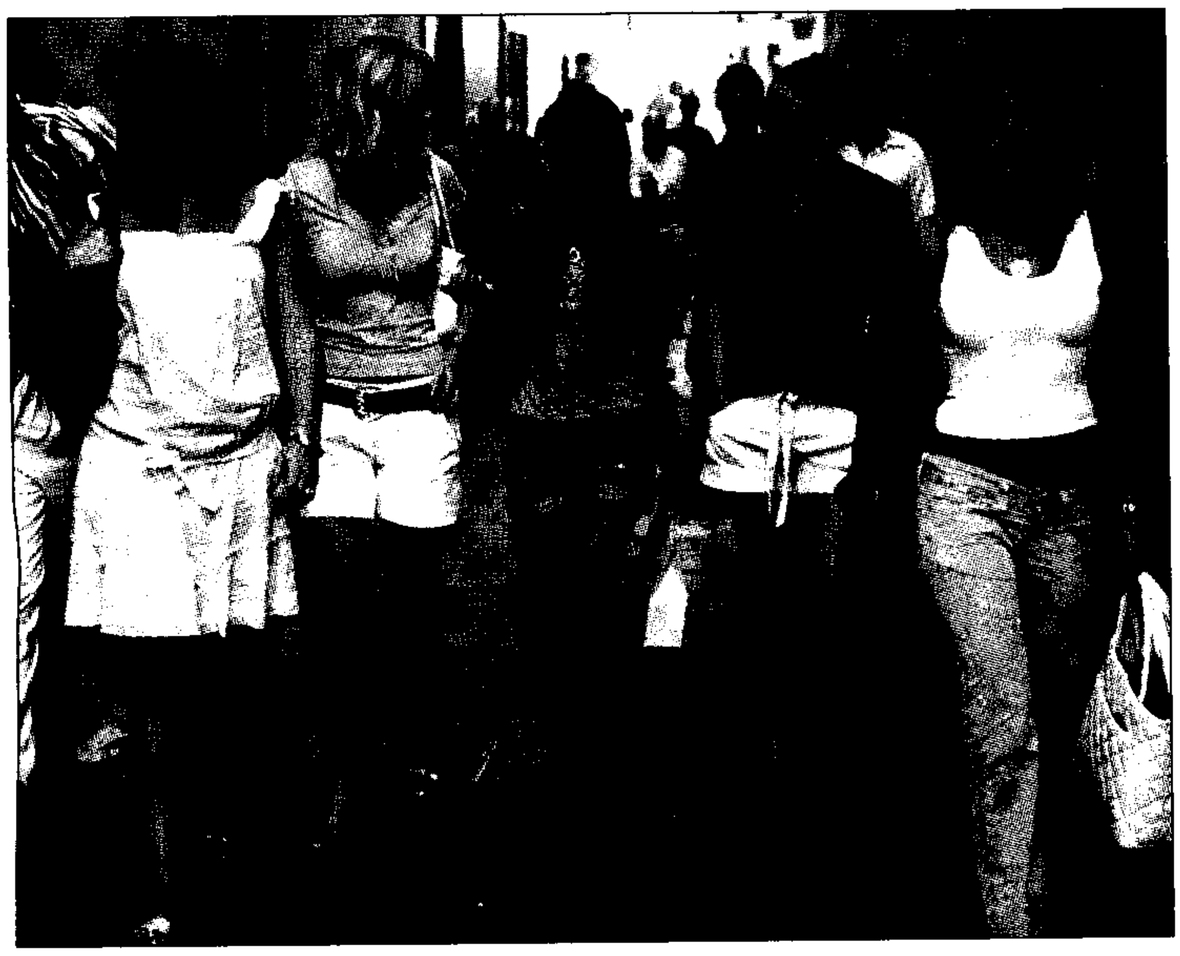
Can We Save Planet Earth?
BBC 1, 9.00 pm, not Northern Ireland

Daily Telegraph

The Daily Tottygraph

Friday, June 23, 2006

Fruity Girls Go Shopping!

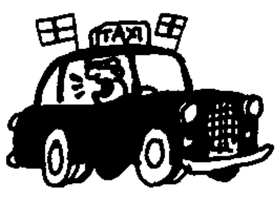


IN AN amazing development yesterday, some fruity girls went to the shops and bought some things *(Reuters)*

On Other Pages Fruity girls enjoy heatwave **2** Fruity girls at St Hilda's do something or other **3** No fruity girls in Iraq, Afghanistan, Indonesia, etc **94**

The Tottygraph – First with the Phews!

A Taxi Driver writes



EVERY week a well-known Cabbie is asked to comment on an issue of topical importance. This week **Alastair Campbell** (cab no. 7324789) on Female Football Commentators.

See that woman on the telly talking about football guv? What does she know? Nuffink, that's what! Women should stay out of football and leave it to us blokes! I mean, it's a man's game innit, it's not natural to see some useless woman writing about it in the paper or running off at the mouth with a load of stuff they don't know nuffink about, mind you I wouldn't say no to a bit of that blonde one on ITV and there's another one on Sky I like a lot but once they open their mouth and start talking bollocks then… where did you say you want to go guv? Catford. I thought you said Cardiff. I had that Lord Hutton in the back once. A very clever man.

© A. Campbell

"You're right! It takes something like this to bring the neighbours together and actually talk to each other!"

POLLY FILLER

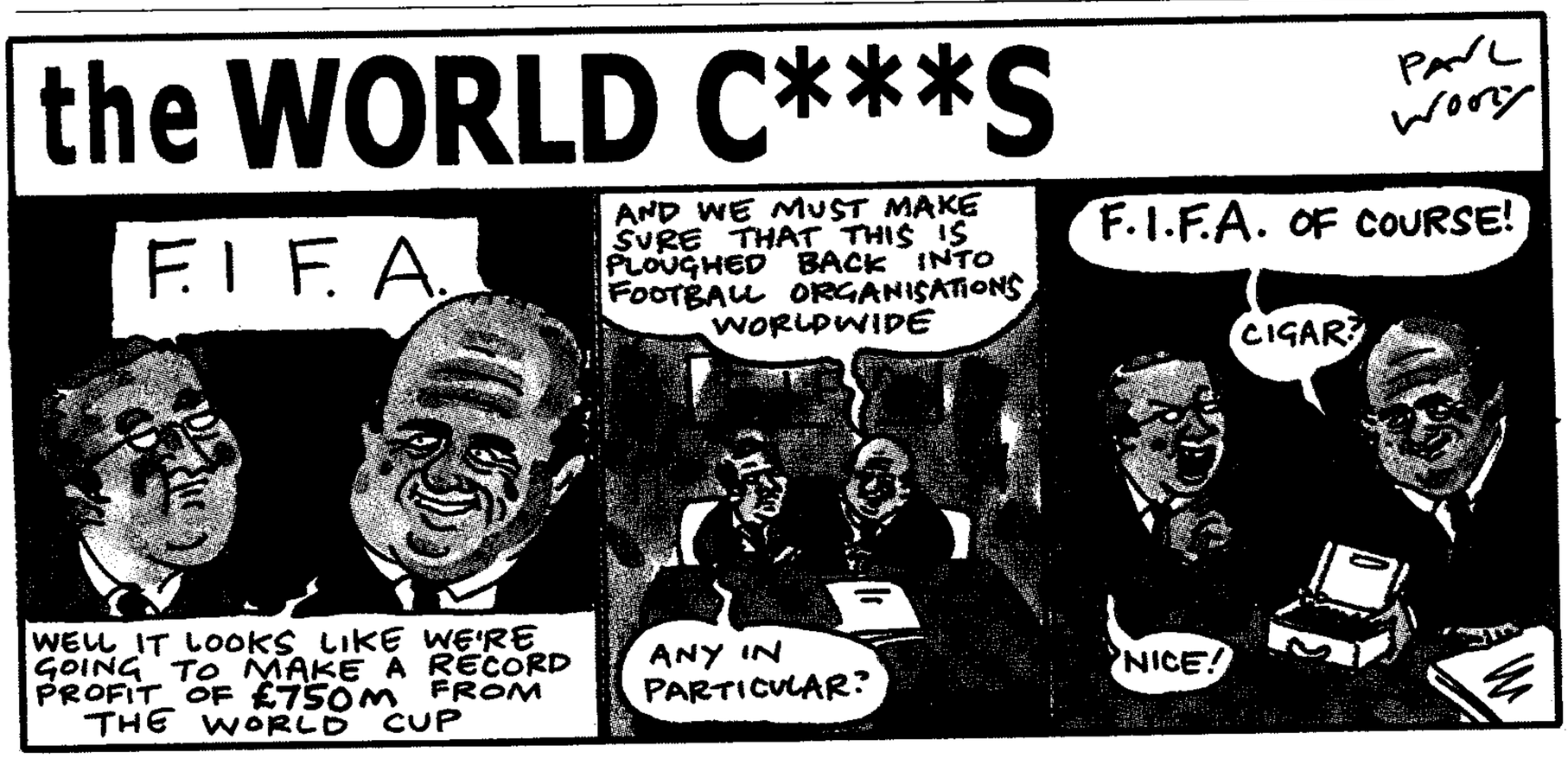
WORLD Cup fever has hit the Filler household! And it's not just the Useless Simon who has gone footie potty, sitting in front of Sky More Plus Extra's Soccer Chat Special with Paul Ross and Kelvin McKenzie!! Yours truly has gone ball barmy as well! Whilst Simon fancies Argentina, I fancy Italy's gorgeous striker, Totti, not to mention Becks, Henry, and anybody in tight shorts called Ronaldo! And I'm not the only one, am I girls?

But there is a downside to both sexes going beautiful-game-bonkers! The washing doesn't get done, the tumble-dryer lies idle, and Simon's underpants remain resolutely unironed! It's domestic meltdown! And why? Because I've had to sack the girl from Angola who wanted to watch the Portugal match instead of cleaning out the oven; then I had to send the girl from Ghana back home because she wanted to watch the Italy game instead of cleaning out the hamster cage; and to cap it all, I had to give the girl from Tobago her marching orders when she asked if she could watch her lot take on Sweden when the toilets needed cleaning!!

HONESTLY, FIFA, if you're going to encourage us women to watch football then you'll have to stop all these developing nations getting into the World Cup! Or the whole world is going to grind to a halt!

Believe me, I've got so desperate that I've had to recruit an au pair from a country with no interest in the World Cup – Scotland! Unfortunately, she keeps demanding to be paid!! Roll on next month when I can send the hopeless and greedy Flora back to McNowheresville and get a nice girl from one of the poorer villages in Paraguay!! Come on, you football!!!

Polly Filler's hilarious World Cup diary *Three Irons on My Shirt – Confessions of a Big Match Mummy!* (£17.99 Johnson and Pearson) is available at all good bookshops.


the WORLD C***S
PAUL WOOLEY
F.I.F.A.
WELL IT LOOKS LIKE WE'RE GOING TO MAKE A RECORD PROFIT OF £750M FROM THE WORLD CUP
AND WE MUST MAKE SURE THAT THIS IS PLOUGHED BACK INTO FOOTBALL ORGANISATIONS WORLDWIDE
ANY IN PARTICULAR?
F.I.F.A. OF COURSE!
CIGAR?
NICE!

BBC BIG SCREEN SHOCK

THE BBC has been forced to take down big screens erected in city centres around the country after embarrassing revelations that people had been watching TV on them.

"We do not want the BBC's name to be sullied by being associated with people watching television. We're only interested in delivering internet-pod-cast-live streaming tardisode downloads directly to people's mobile phones", said a BBC (*cont'd page 94*)

'STOP MOANING AND DEAL WITH THE YOBS YOURSELF' Reid's Shock Outburst

by Our Home Office Staff **A.S.B. O'Booze**

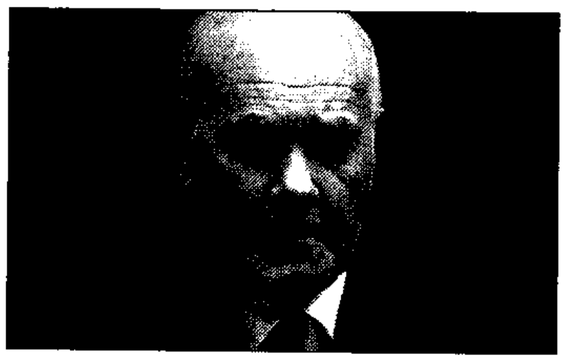
THE Home Secretary Dr John Reid last night lashed out at the British public for being "soft on yobs".

"It's all your fault," he told everyone in the country, "that we are having to put up with foul-mouthed bullies who throw their weight around.

"Take myself, for example," he went on, "it's no good moaning about the fact that a coarse Glaswegian lout has been allowed to take charge of one government department after another.

"I should have been stopped in my tracks years ago, before I did any more damage.

"But not one of you had the guts to step in and say 'enough is enough'. It's not surprising the country is in the mess that it is."



REID'S SHOCK RETRACTION

DR JOHN Reid last night issued a statement explaining that he had misquoted himself.

When he had been reported as inviting the public to "have a go and stop moaning," he had actually said, "Whatever you do, don't have a go, and carry on moaning, as you have every right to do under the European Convention on Human Rights."

REID'S SHOCK NEW CRACKDOWN

THE HOME Secretary last night issued two new simple guidelines which in future will revolutionise the criminal justice system in Great Britain.

These are as follows:

1. If a person is innocent they shall be immediately arrested and imprisoned.

2. If a person is guilty they shall immediately be allowed to go scot-free.

Dr Reid said last night, "At last we have a justice system that is fit for purpose – i.e. to make it look as though I am doing something."

Latest Home Office Initiative To Reduce Prison Numbers

Mary Ann Bighead

Hoorah For Father's Day!

Father's Day in the Bighead household was, as ever, a major event. Lots of other families don't bother much about Father's Day, but then they don't have a brilliant hands-on Dad like Mr Bighead who excels at everything, from nappy-changing to discovering the human genome!! And well done me for being so clever as to choose *him* to be father of Intelligencia (8) and Brainella (3) in the first place!

So, whilst other less able families had to make do with a shop-bought card and a pair of socks, in the Bighead family Dad woke up to the sound of the two girls expertly playing a superb cello duet, composed by Brainella. He then opened his special present – a leatherbound volume of Intelligencia's translation of Sir Thomas Aquinas's "Summa Catholicae Fidei Contra Gentiles." from the Latin into rhyming Sanskrit couplets!

Then he had a pot of his favourite Earl Greymatter tea (a Bighead culinary speciality!) and, finally, we all watched a video of me on Question Time being incredible clever. What a perfect day. Poor old other families whose lives aren't as marvellous as mine. Still, it serves them right for not being as clever as me!

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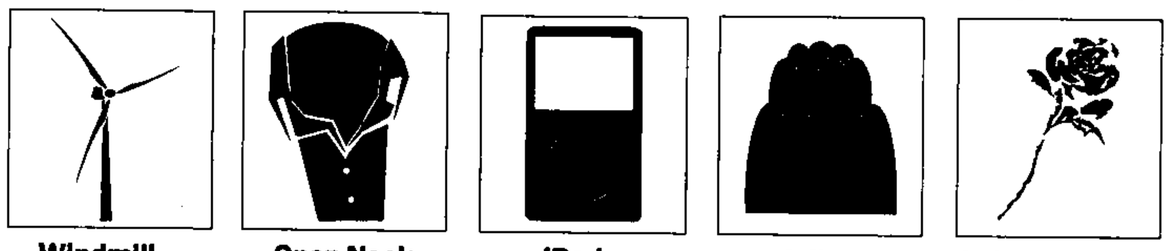
Now You Too Can Be Part Of Dave Cameron's Exciting New Tory Party Of Tomorrow!

A HELP us to choose a new go-ahead logo for the 21st Century, instead of the boring, out-of-date torch that belongs to the bad old days of Mrs Thatcher.

■ **WHAT would you like to see as the iconic symbol of the modern, exciting, go-ahead Cameron Party?**



Windmill – Green! **Open-Neck Shirt – Casual!** **iPod – Modern!** **Jelly – Flexible!** **Labour Rose – Perfect!**

B **NOW you have chosen the logo, would you like to be the next Mayor of London?**

You don't have to know much about politics or London, but just complete this simple questionnaire:

1. The current Mayor of London is

a) Ken Livingstone?

b) Wayne Rooney?

c) Sir Peregrine Worsthorne?

2. The Great Fire of London was in

a) Paris?

b) London?

c) Peterborough?

3. The River Thames is

a) a statue?

b) a river?

c) a grapefruit segment?

And now complete the following sentence in not more than 10 words:

"I would like to be Conservative Mayor of London because.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

....."

C **ONGRATULATIONS!** You are now Mayor of London and a member of the Conservative Party.

THE SUN SAYS

LOCK UP THE PAEDO PLAYWRIGHT!

Why is this monster free to roam the theatres of New York? He has been found guilty of writing a sick play about a molester of under-age boys.

Yet is this fiend behind bars where he belongs?

No! He has been allowed to "pick up" no fewer than six innocent Tonys on seedy Broadway!

How perverted can you get?

The Sun says: "It's time 'Bennett the Bespectacled Beast' was made History, Boys!?!

International Whaling Committee

HEWITT LAUNCHES BREATHING PACK

by Our Health Staff **Annie State**

HEALTH SECRETARY Patricia Hewitt yesterday unveiled her new £2 billion campaign to "get Britain breathing".

In a leaflet to be issued to every household in the country, Ms Hewitt lays down new guidelines which she believes could save millions of lives every year.

"Breathing is probably the most important thing in all our lives. And yet no one is given any help in how to do it."

A video to be issued with the pamphlet demonstrates, with the aid of animated figures based on the Teletubbies, how every one of us can benefit from breathing.

Says Ms Hewitt "it only takes a few minutes to read the leaflet and watch the video – and yet it can make all the difference between life and death."

The leaflet sets out detailed, easy-to-follow instructions on how to breathe in, and equally to breathe out. It underlines the dangers of holding one's breath for too long, or even of forgetting to breathe at all.

The leaflet entitled "Breathing – A Strategy for Survival" is published by the Government Publications Agency (formerly Her Majesty's Stationery Office).

PROTESTS AS QUEEN IS AUCTIONED OFF

by Our Saleroom Staff **Brian R. Sewell**

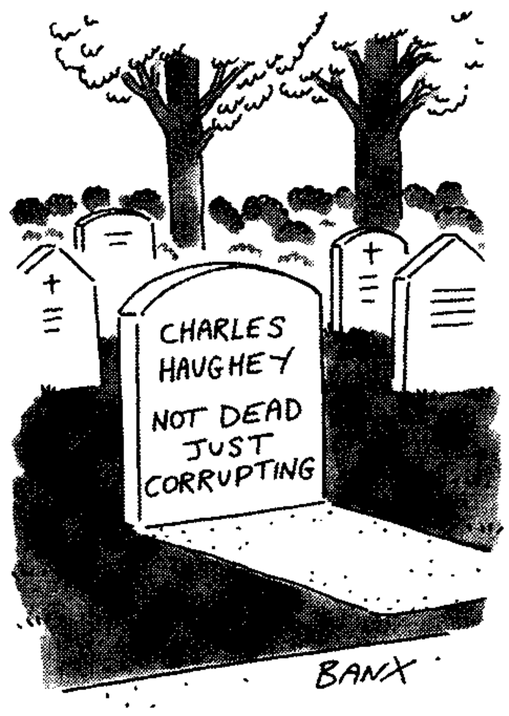
A FURIOUS row erupted yesterday when Her Majesty the Queen was offered for sale at the prestigious auction house of Christie's, in order to pay death duties.

Said the Duke of Edinburgh, "It is a very sad day for me, as I have become used to having the Queen in the house.

"But I was left with no alternative. This is what comes of letting in the Labour Party."

Full story with pictures **p. 94**

HEATHER 'HIGH-CLASS HOOKER' CLAIMS



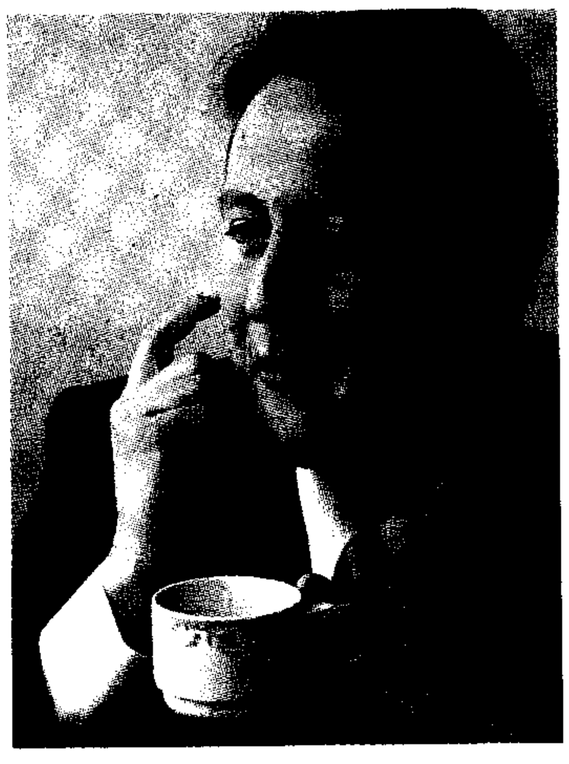
The woman was taken to a north London hospital but discharged after being shot in the back.

Islington Tribune

EYE QUIZ

CAN you spot the differences between these two photographs?

(Here's a clue: There aren't any.)



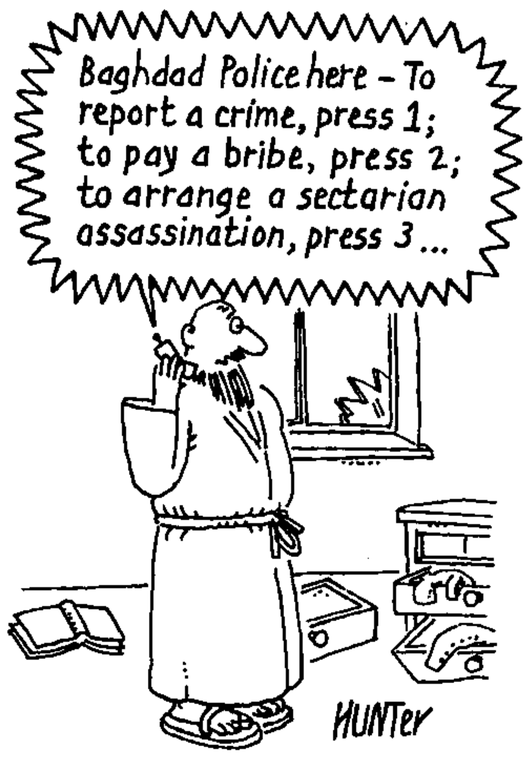
Send your answers now to Spot The Difference Competition No. 3642, c/o Daily Mail and win a special cup of tea with the politician of your choice.

The Book of Ehud

Chapter 94

1. And lo, at that time Ehud came to rule over Israel, for Sharon lay sick even unto death.
2. But not quite.
3. So the children of Israel looked unto Ehud to rule in his stead.
4. And they asked themselves, "What manner of man is he, for we have never heard of him."
5. And some amongst them said, "Verily, he is an smiter, like unto Sharon, and would guard the children of Israel by smiting the Fatah-ites, the Hamas-ites and all the other Arab-ites too numerous to mention."
6. But others shook their heads, saying that Ehud was a lover of peace, like unto Rabin the Peacemaker, who was slain for not being keen enough on the smiting.
7. And it came to pass that, in those days, certain Arab-ites, that dwelleth in Gaza, men, women and children, one with another, did go out of the city to the seashore, where they laid out on a cloth a plentiful supply of meat and drink sufficient unto their needs.
8. And, as they sat at their humble feasting, a mighty Leviathan rose up from the deep and breathed fire upon them.
9. This great behemoth was eighty cubits in length and forty cubits in height, even as high as the great wall of Sharon, which towereth afar off to ensure that the children of Israel were not troubled in their tents.
10. And, behold, the Leviathan poured out its fire and smoke upon the Arab-ites as they sat upon the shore, with a mighty noise like unto that of an exploding shell.
11. And the Arab-ites were slain, each and every one of them.
12. And there was in the streets of Gaza much wailing and gnashing of teeth.
13. And the cry went up, "Our brothers and sisters have been slain by the children of Israel. For the monster that we have seen emerging from the deeps looketh uncannily like an Type-23 Israel destroyer armed with 155-millimetre shells, beàring the inscription "Madeth in the USA", which is to say "the land of Dubya".
14. And Ehud waxed wroth at the words of the Arab-ites, saying unto them, "Ye must be joking. What manner of nonsense do ye speak? Verily, I do not believe that I am hearing this."
15. And Ehud sayeth again unto them, "Verily, ye are as blind as the bat that flitteth hither and yon in the caves of Nablus.
16. "For this calamity that hath befallen your people was caused by an monster, exactly as described above.
17. "Or possibly by an mighty swarm of killer locusts which the Lord hath sent.
18. "Or, then again, it might have been a plague of poisonous frogs, suddenly emerging from the waters, devouring all who stand in their way.
19. "I say unto you that only an little child would believe all this nonsense about the children of Israel being responsible for smiting the Arab-ites.
20. "And if ye carry on repeating this falsehood, ye may well find a lot more Leviathans popping up all over the place, to smite you an hundredfold."

(Here endeth the Book of Ehud)



HOW THE US GOT ZARQAWI

by Our Military Staff **Col. Lateral-Damage**

AT A press conference yesterday the US military command revealed how they managed to take out the head of Al Qaida in Iraq.

A spokesman said that they had used the latest missile technology and satellite intelligence, but had added a new tactical refinement which had enabled them to deliver the killer blow.

Said a spokesman, "We reversed our normal strategy and aimed a missile directly at a building full of civilians. It missed, of course, and hit an international terrorist by mistake instead."

He concluded, "This is a major breakthrough in the war against error." *(Surely "terror"? Ed.)*

BUSH IN SURPRISE BAGHDAD VISIT

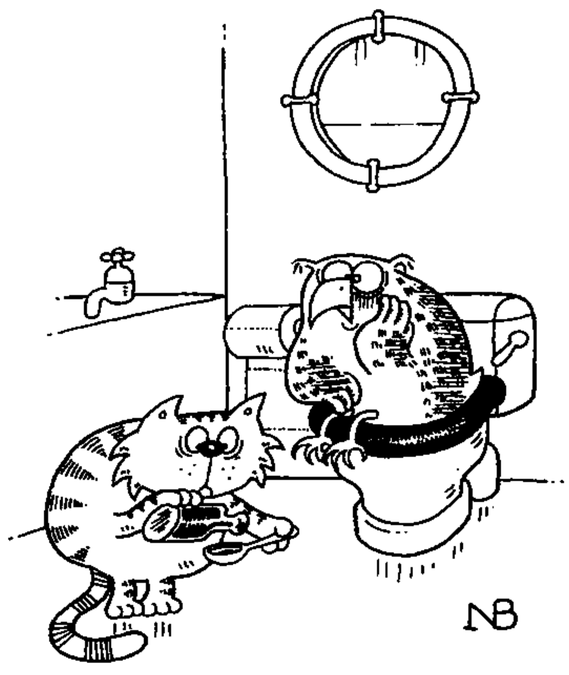
For forty years the satirical magazine Private Eye has held it's regular lunches in a dinghy upstairs room of the Coach and Horses pub in Greek Street Soho.

The Anglo-Celt

And when all that walking has tired you out, jump aboard one of Strasbourg's sleek and futuristic tramps to sweep you onto your next stop.

Doncaster Free Press

MODERN NURSERY RHYMES



The Owl and the Pussycat
went to sea
On a cruise liner bound
for Tangier.
They took some sodium
and lots of Imodium,
But both ended up with
diarrhoea.

DIARY

JONATHAN AITKEN: MY HEROES

MARK THATCHER: I always liked Mark Thatcher. Despite the often vicious rumours surrounding him, I always found him as honest and decent as he looked.

It does the man great credit that, finding himself in the impossible position of being the son of the Prime Minister, and with no qualifications to his name, he still managed to build a considerable personal fortune.

He is no saint – which of us can claim that for ourselves? – but there is a different side to his character, which has gone largely unreported. He has never, to my knowledge, kicked an old man – or indeed an old woman – in the street. Nor has he ever indulged in a bout of serial killing. I wonder how many of his journalistic detractors can claim the same for themselves?

It is all too easy to mistake his shyness for abrasiveness. Once at a private party in the Thatchers' Chelsea home, the young Mark, fearfully shy, took out his gold lighter and set fire to a sofa. There followed predictable howls of complaint from those who were lounging on the sofa at the time, and one or two may have ended up in hospital, but it is too easily forgotten that the sofa was threadbare, and sorely in need of replacement.

And it is too often overlooked that, having set fire to that sofa, Mark proceeded, with the utmost courtesy, to light the cigarettes of several of his fellow guests. In the furore of a media witch-hunt, such considerate gestures from this fearfully insecure but fundamentally decent young man are all too easily forgotten.

Mark may have sailed close to the wind in his various business ventures, but all the great British seamen in our island story – Raleigh, Drake, Nelson – have found the same courage deep within their hearts, sailing close to the wind in order to plough the ocean's waves towards victory. The world would be a duller place without him.

WILLIAM BUNTER: It was desperately unfair of vindictive journalists to portray my old friend and business partner "Billy" as greedy. Far from it. He may have been well-covered, but he was never remotely overweight. Popular among his schoolfriends and colleagues, he had the sharpest sight of any man I ever knew.

JIMMY AND ASPERS: Like two comets lighting up the sky as they traverse the galaxies, Jimmy Goldsmith and John Aspinall blazed a path across the hearts of their friends with a dazzling illumination that will not be forgotten until our time is come.

I well remember inviting Jimmy and Aspers to a private dinner I gave at the Dorchester Hotel for Emperor Bokassa in the 1970s. It was my masterstroke. Poor Empy-Kassy had been sorely ill-treated by the media, and needed cheering up. He may have been a cannibal, but he was also a great family man, with a real interest in antique porcelain. I had no doubt in my mind that Jimmy and Aspers, with their robust wit and wonderfully politically incorrect repartee would provide the Emperor with a strong dose of stout English humour and good sense.

And so it proved. Money, politics and power were the stuff of life to those two larger-than-life characters. Over our first course of Beluga caviar, spooned into our mouths by our hugely attractive female companions, many of them titled, Jimmy and Aspers expounded on their plans for the redevelopment of Australia.

Jimmy was convinced that a sustained nuclear attack would leave the entire country free for re-development. Aspers, who was in with him on the plan, reckoned that the Aborigine, being part-kangaroo, would survive a nuclear attack, and thus provide first-rate slave-labour for Jimmy's plans to convert the continent, at minimum cost, into his principal private estate.

Bokassa was visibly excited by these plans, but his excitement seemed to wane when the main course – medaillons de veau – was brought in. Sensing his disappointment, and wishing to make this shy and sensitive man feel at home, I asked him whether he would prefer to eat something else.

Ever-alert to the needs of others, Aspers, with his prodigious energy, immediately speared our wine-waiter through the heart with a magnificent Aztec spear he had brought with him, just in case. He then proceeded to roast the waiter over the log-fire, until he was done to the proverbial crisp.

Honour was satisfied, and Emperor Bokassa hugely enjoyed his repast, requesting a doggy-bag for a picnic later in the week. This was yet another example of the charm and generosity of Jimmy and Aspers. The world would have been a much duller place without them. Sadly, both philanthropists were to die before their plans for the redevelopment of Australia could proceed apace. The world would have been a much duller place without them.

CRUELLA DE VIL: An animal-lover, it does Cruella great credit that throughout her life she has cared for so many dogs, at great expense to herself.

At one point in the late Sixties, I became romantically involved with Cruella. This is neither the time nor the place to delve into our intimacies. Suffice it to say she found me an inventive and inspiring lover. When her beloved dalmatians turned on her and reported her to the media, it broke her heart. She had done all that she could for those dogs, and this was the way they chose to repay her. I sometimes think there is little place for the entrepreneurial spirit in this politically-correct world of ours.

FREDERICK WEST: His journalistic detractors tend to forget that there was another, more sensitive, side to top builder Fred West.

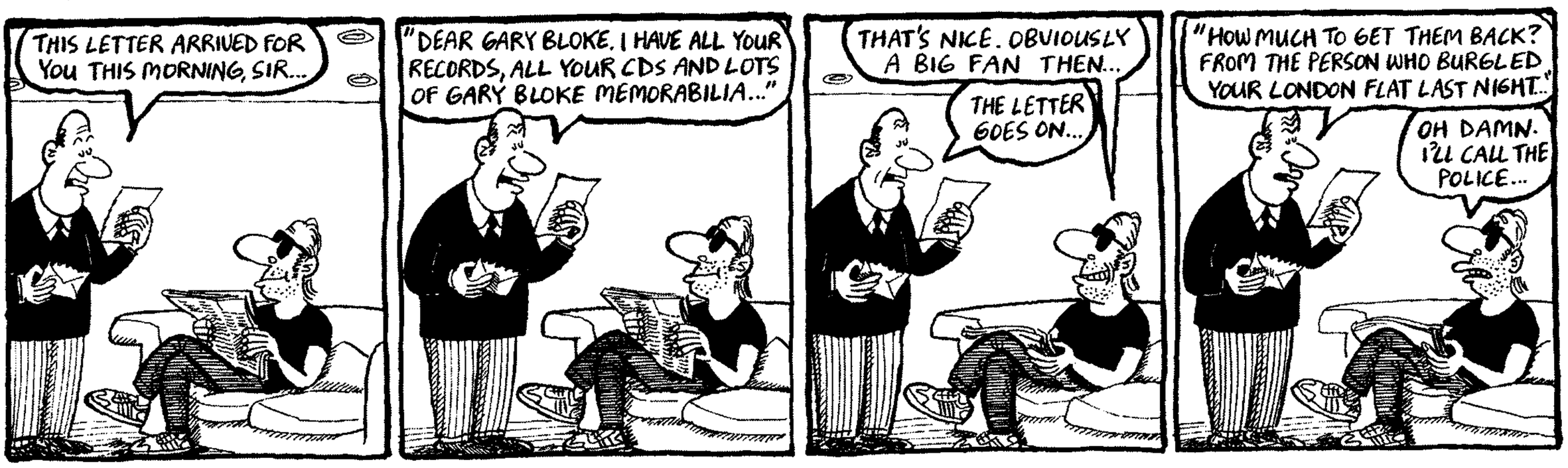
I would be the first to admit that sometimes Fred sailed pretty close to the wind. But it is all too easily forgotten that he was a first-rate builder, with a growing reputation for efficiency and courtesy in Gloucester and surrounding areas.

It is symptomatic of our age that the media concentrate on the negative aspects of so many energetic and forceful personalities. I do not blame them for this, but I sometimes wonder whether our world would not be a more loving and forgiving place were they sometimes, faced with larger-than-life characters such as Fred, to take a more positive approach. The world is a duller place without him.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


THIS LETTER ARRIVED FOR YOU THIS MORNING, SIR...
"DEAR GARY BLOKE. I HAVE ALL YOUR RECORDS, ALL YOUR CDS AND LOTS OF GARY BLOKE MEMORABILIA..."
THAT'S NICE. OBVIOUSLY A BIG FAN THEN...
THE LETTER GOES ON...
"HOW MUCH TO GET THEM BACK? FROM THE PERSON WHO BURGLED YOUR LONDON FLAT LAST NIGHT..."
OH DAMN. I'LL CALL THE POLICE...

Literary Review

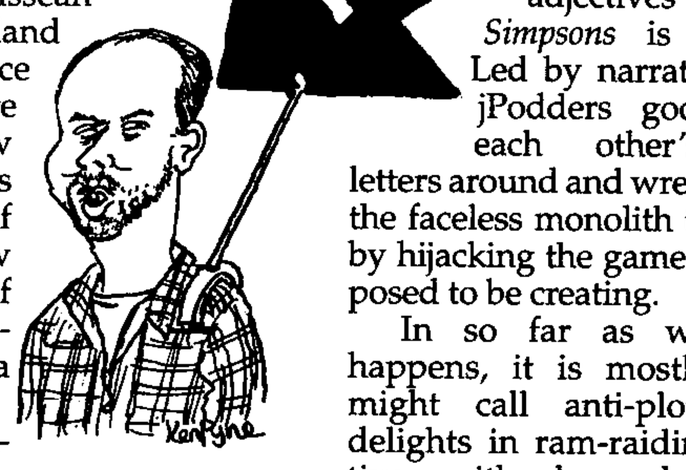
Irony filings

jPod

Douglas Coupland

(Bloomsbury, £12.99)

BACK in March, Douglas Coupland wrote a rather telling piece for the *Observer*'s music magazine. He had been dispatched to interview Morrissey, one of the few quotable pop stars ever to have lived. But rather than give readers a chance to revel in some Morrissean bon mots, Coupland choose to place himself centre stage, filing a few thousand words on the futility of the interview process itself ("Fuck interviews" being a typical insight).



The magazine's letters page, and doubtless the editor who'd paid for a "name" writer to fly from Vancouver to Rome and back, were understandably piqued. But the non-interview also left you wondering about Coupland's motives. Principally, if interviews are so pointless, why did he agree to do one?

You could say much the same about Coupland and his latest novel, *jPod*. Quite simply – why did he bother? As with his *Observer* piece there is evidence here of genuine disdain not just for his readers, but also for the form in which he is writing itself. Within *jPod* you will find, among other things, the first 100,000 digits of pi, the 8,363 prime numbers between 1,000 and 10,000, all the three-letter words in Scrabble (with one bogus selection), phishing emails, computer error codes and so on. We are asked to presume that there is some meaning to all of this drivel on the basis that Douglas Coupland is a novelist of some repute. Hell, he speaks at Hay; so perhaps what looks like balderdash is actually abstruse formal experimentation?

The reader might be more inclined to give Coupland the benefit of the doubt if the rest of *jPod* was more rewarding, but it turns out that the list of 8,363 prime numbers is one of the more interesting passages in the book. A plot summary is unavoidably slight: six code-pigs find themselves in a forgotten silo of a large computer game company, thanks to a database glitch that seated people together whose surnames begin with "J". Holed up in the "jPod", theirs is a world of geekery and low-grade autism where brand names are more resonant than adjectives and *The Simpsons* is Shakespeare. Led by narrator Ethan, the jPodders goof off, swap each other's keyboard letters around and wreak revenge on the faceless monolith they work for by hijacking the game they are supposed to be creating.

In so far as what actually happens, it is mostly what you might call anti-plot: Coupland delights in ram-raiding the narrative with brazenly outlandish twists, and none of these receives any authorial comment whatsoever. So when a biker is murdered and then buried by Ethan's marijuana-growing mother; or when a people-smuggling, ballroom-dancing Chinaman takes over Ethan's apartment and becomes his dad's best friend; or when a middle-management wonk from the game company achieves karma after being kidnapped, taken to China and force-fed heroin; all of these are reported in a glib, laconic monotone.

At one level, of course, this can be funny – we know about Coupland's ear for the wry one-liner and his ability to prick absurdity in the modern world from *Microserfs*. But after 400 pages in which every single occurrence is treated with the same "Oh well," you find yourself longing for some sort of moral barometer.

Coupland's get-out clause, of course, is irony – the ultimate literary airbag for the sloth with a pen. "I don't think I see the world in terms of stupid or clever, but in terms of being able to get irony," he said in a more recent interview with the *Observer* (oddly, "fuck interviews" had been forgotten when it came to plugging his book.) His ironic intent reaches its apogee with the introduction of a character called Douglas Coupland, which, as Paul Auster, Martin Amis, Bret Easton-Ellis and countless others can attest, is the last refuge of the post-modern writer who's run out of ideas.

It means that at times the jPodders say things like "I feel like a refugee from a Douglas Coupland novel", *in* a Douglas Coupland novel. Again, if you're feeling generous you might call this a tacit comment on a world so self-referential that meaning ceases to exist. But again, Coupland has done nothing to deserve such generosity – you sense he is merely layering irony upon irony to conceal the fact that he has nothing to say, or nothing that he hasn't already said in *Microserfs*. So, to return to our earlier conundrum, why on earth did he write it? Turn to page 446 for the answer: "My contract says I have to write a book," says the character Douglas Coupland about the book we are holding. Such an admission is, of course, supposed to be deeply ironic. But in light of all that's gone before, it has the strange ring of truth.

Homes spun

This Book Will Save Your Life

A.M. Homes

(Granta Books, £14.99)

WHEN the signature "A.M. Homes" began to appear in up-market literary magazines about 15 years ago – mostly, but not always, on the farther side of the Atlantic – there were great doubts as to whether the initialled disguise concealed a man or a woman.

For a while, given that A.M. inclined towards sprightly tales in which lissom Yankee lads "cornholed" each other in bath-tubs, the smart money was on "male homosexual". Then some truth-seeking public servant – possibly the editors of the *Penguin Book of Gay Short Stories* – blew the lid: the forename was "Amy". That Ms H, a decade or so later, is slightly less coy about gender issues may be inferred from a glamour-puss photo on the inside back jacket.

From the vantage point of the British reader, Amy's notoriety – and that is not too strong a word – derives from *The End of Alice*, her fake paedophile memoir, published over here in 1997, and the source of a great deal of moral outrage courtesy of the NSPCC and other bodies not generally known for their interest in literature. There followed one of those absolutely pointless debates about censorship so beloved of the liberal broadsheets, whose fervour tended to obscure two rather salient points: i) that *The End of Alice* wasn't a terribly good book; and ii) that its affectless tone was an authorial cop-out, in which Ms H, having fashioned this glistening thing of horror, casually exited the crime scene while allowing onlookers to clear up the mess themselves.

Readers of a sensitive nature will be relieved to hear that, on the evidence of *This Book Will Save Your Life*, Homes has since foresworn the bleakly transgressive for West Coast wryness. Her protagonist, fifty-something Richard Novak, is a self-entombed solipsist, holed up in a nice little house outside of LA where he trades his stocks, lollops on his treadmill, chats to his housekeeper and eats the unappetising daily packages provided by his nutritionist. There are various family members dispersed about the place – ex-wife and teenage son in New York, a high-flying scientific brother in Boston – but no, Richard keeps himself to himself. Until, that is, the evening when a "staggering, sweating, dizzy-making" pain throws him into a terrified heap on the sofa.

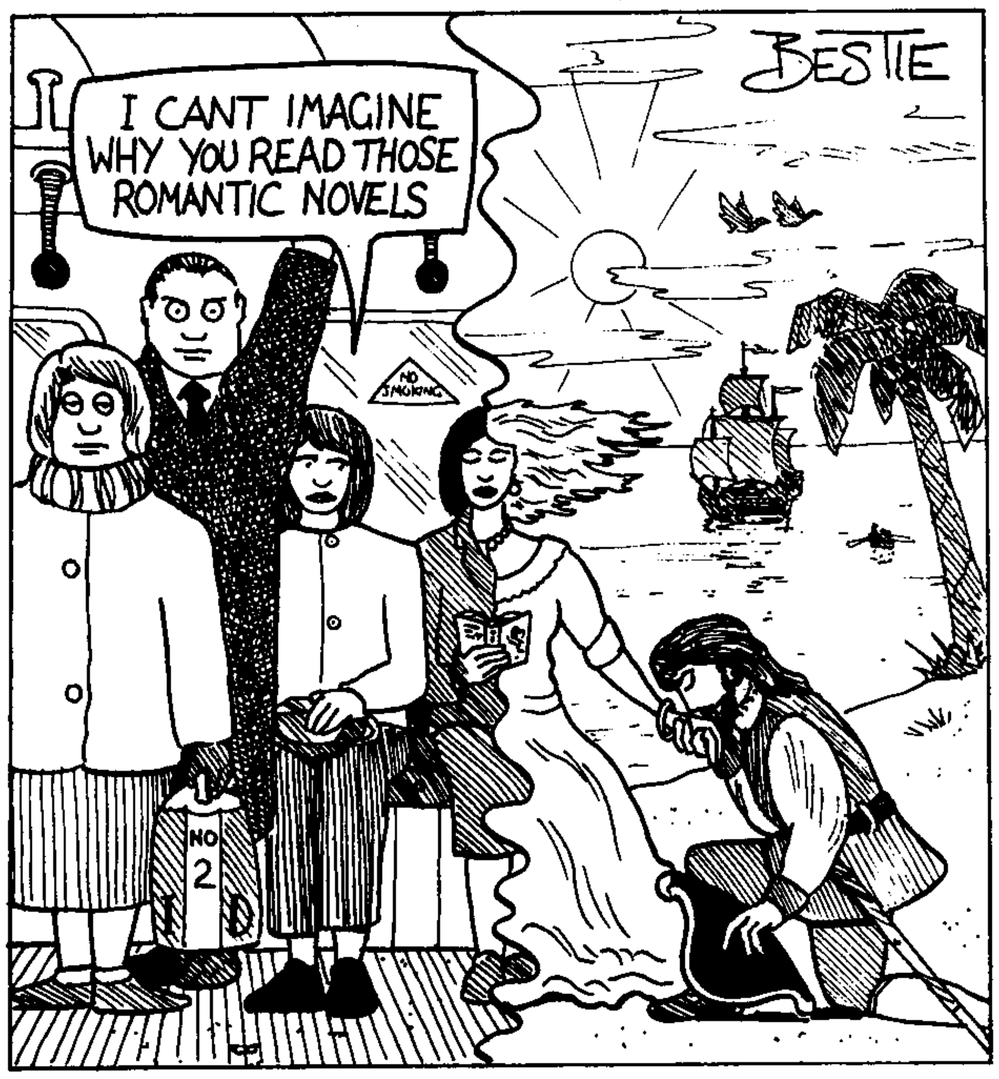
Discharged from hospital (the medics are puzzled) he finds his existence incrementally transformed. Courteous Anhil in the local drive-thru supplies uplifting chat and donuts. Inspirational Dr Lusardi opines that he needs to "be brought back to life". Pretty soon our man is coming on like an all-purpose romantic hero, rescuing a horse from the mysterious hole that

has opened up alongside his house with the help of the amiable local movie star, springing an abducted woman from a car-boot, offering assistance and (platonic) comfort to Cynthia, an overwrought housewife found crying in a supermarket aisle. As to the vocal style, well, this here is a modern American novel folks, and everyone wisecracks gamely away just like it was an episode of *Friends*. "I hate broccoli," someone remarks. "The only reason I voted for George Bush was because he hated his vegetables as much as I do." Relocated to Malibu, after the hole threatens his premises with subsidence, Richard is informed that the new pad was used for the filming of *Shampoo*. "And never rinsed," he mercilessly shoots back.

Noel Coward it patently ain't. But *This Book Will Save Your Life's* real drawback is not its straining

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
HEADLINE BOOK PUBLISHING PRESENTS
BEING GAZZA
THE No.1 BESTSELLER!
OH DEAR - HE'S HAD TOO MUCH TO DRINK AND NOW HE'S CRYING
BEING GAZZA
WE SHOULD'VE PUBLISHED IT... IT'S NOT FAIR SOB
I LOVE YOU GAZZA...

dialogue but the sheer randomness of its activity. Connecting up with his loved ones, adrift in a haze of almost accidental do-gooding, Richard simply wanders benignantly about, attending a silent retreat here, hooking up with a one-breasted Gyrotonics instructor there, taking a band of retirement homers out to the local farmer's market shortly afterwards. Drifting out to sea in the final scene, after a flood has washed the Malibu bolt-hole outside into the Pacific, he can be found telling his son – via cell phone as the boy watches on CNN – "I'll always be here, even when you can't see me, I'm still here." The thought of the film, in which Tom Hanks will play Richard and Rene Zellweger the yowling housewife, is almost too much to be borne. Meanwhile, in terms of the duff Americana recently dumped on this shores, A.M. Homes is not quite as bad as Bret Easton Ellis but perhaps slightly worse than Jay McInerney.



Books & Bookmen

■ EYEBROWS were raised when Orange Prize winner Zadie Smith made her triumphant exit accompanied by India Knight, her friend, Penguin stablemate – and one of the judges. Of course such links exist in the incestuous world of books, the sisters whispered, but why make them quite so obvious?

At least it won't have been hard for Knight to find someone who can sympathise with the painful experience of weighing up whether to award a chum a tidy sum. A week later her partner, the novelist Andrew O'Hagan, was on the panel that gave the €100,000 IMPAC Dublin award to Colm Toibin, his co-editor on Picador's New Writing 11.

■ THE paperback of Giles Coren's novel *Winkler* received a generous plug this month from... Giles Coren, who revealed in his *Times* column that it was "by turns funny and tragic... published in paperback just last week by Vintage at the staggeringly reasonable price of £7.99."

Sadly not all his colleagues appear to share his enthusiasm. At the *Times'* own book sale a fortnight ago -- held to clear the literary department's cupboards of review copies, with all proceeds going to charity -- several hardback copies of *Winkler* were on sale for the princely sum of £1. Most of them were still there at the end of the day.

'Bookworm'

FILM UPDATE

A YEAR after the British Film Institute (BFI) cut back its technical jobs while creating new management roles (*Eye* 1135), the government-funded body is trying to recruit unpaid volunteers to do the meticulous work of checking its library database.

The BFI is advertising for "people with high levels of expertise in particular areas of film and television", and "people who are passionate about maintaining accuracy" to improve the database by correcting mistakes and adding records based on information sent in by people using the online version of the database – all in return for a bit of training and free access to the BFI library.

It's certainly an optimistic approach to recruitment – but how many people who really have the knowledge and skill for the job will be willing to do it for no pay? And will visitors to the BFI's swanky new Mediatheque building on the South Bank, due to open later this year, be made aware how much of the expert work is being done on the cheap?

HIGH PRINCIPALS

A PLYMOUTH further education college had to cough up £279,000 to Customs after a failed "artificial tax avoidance" scheme.

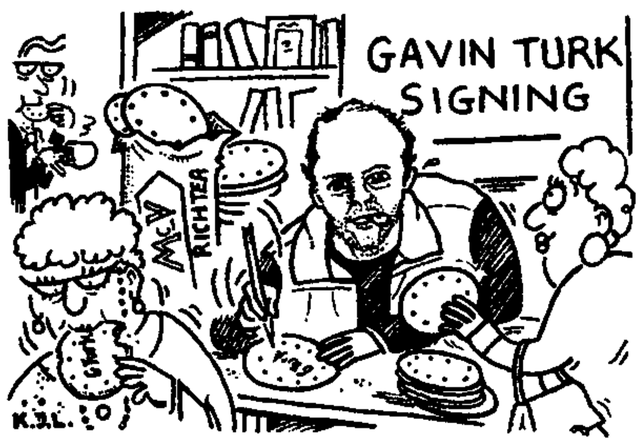
The College of St Mark and St John has been struggling with a deficit of more than £300,000 and cutting budgets, including not replacing staff who left. So lecturers were fascinated to read about the college's tax arrangements in an appendix to their new application to the Privy Council for degree awarding powers.

In 2001, the College of St Mark and St John set up "Marjon Developments Ltd" as a subsidiary company as part of a scheme to exempt from VAT the construction costs of building the Henry Durowse Centre (containing the media studies, PR studies and theology departments). However, that same year Halifax plc lost a VAT test case over similar dubious arrangements for constructing its call centres, on the grounds that there was "no business or commercial rationale" for the way the scheme was set up, other than to avoid tax.

Although Halifax continued to appeal its case until losing in Europe this February, HM Customs and Excise refused to accept the college's scheme and demanded its taxes. The application says that the £279,000 of VAT has been paid, and is "being written off over a period of time" in the college's accounts.

I like dressing up, I like watching people, I enjoy loneliness, I like Parisian prostitutes from the early 1900s, true ladies, I'd like Nick Cave to sing to me as I bled to death.

'Goth Pop Princess' BETTY CURSE, *Times* 'The Knowledge' magazine



For a while now he's been interested in staple foods – bread, tea – and he's fairly sure that this time he's going to do something for the ACBF using Rich Tea biscuits, 'which are strange sculptures in themselves. I like the fact they're called Rich Tea. They're nothing to do with being rich... or anything to do with tea, really.' Maybe he'll sign them, which would be very Gavin Turk. Possibly he'll emboss them. 'I want to use very economic means to create something which can actually be a cultural springboard.'

Artist GAVIN TURK's contribution to the Art Car Boot Fair, *Observer Magazine*

Pseuds Corner

This is the best kind of football writing, dripping in detail, focusing on an extraordinary twist of the game just as if it were the sighing string section of a Mozart concerto, or the hypnotic camera glide of a Kieslowski film.

PETE ASPDEN reviewing *90 minutes*, football photographs by Robert Davies with an essay by Richard Williams, *Financial Times*

"Hamburg gave me the best anecdotal evidence yet that the German passion for efficiency is alive and well. As I crossed the road waiting for the red man to turn green, I noticed a clock ticking down at the side. It was a timer to let you know how long you'd have to wait before you could cross the road... My head was buzzing as the timer sparked off all kinds of questions: is it any wonder this country has given us Goethe and Kant?"

GABBY LOGAN
Times, June 13

Well over a billion people – about a fifth of the world's population – live in absolute poverty and the United Nations plans to halve this figure by 2015. That is the same target year that the University of Manchester has set for becoming one of the world's top 25 universities. And the two goals are not mutually exclusive.

From the University of Manchester's *Your Manchester* alumni magazine

"The Truth in Painting" is a series of 26 canvases. All the paintings are grey. The grey pigment was hand created by the artists by burning two copies of "The Truth in Painting" by Jacques Derrida. "The Truth in Painting" is Derrida's seminal contribution to the theory of painting. The two books burned by Maris differed in only one respect – one book was read by the artists, the other remained unopened. The two sets of 13 canvasses painted using the pigment thus created also differ. The unread book created deep grey paintings while the read book created paintings that were much lighter.

All the canvasses are small beautiful works in themselves – as a whole however the installation answers ALL of the questions asked by art thinkers and practitioners since the beginning of art criticism.

Statement from Glasgow artists Maris, Heart Gallery, Edinburgh

CONTRIBUTORS: Nigel Goldsmith, Daniel H. Manning, Malcolm Bielby, Strobes, Robin Lee, David Hugo.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

TORTURE

Any old leg irons

THE US army is importing 5,000 leg irons with attachable belly chains as part of the "reconstruction" of "security and justice" in Iraq.

British firms cannot export such kit because since 1997 they have been defined as "instruments of torture". The Americans want the shackles for the Baghdad jails they will soon be handing over to the Iraqis.

Private Eye learnt of the plan to import ankle restraints, along with handcuffs and padlocks, when an email written by Jordanian and Iraqi businessmen discussing the deal was passed to our offices. An analysis of attached documents discussing the quality of irons showed that the manacles were required by the US army's Project Contracting Office in Iraq.

The US tender sought 5,000 pairs of leg irons and other chains for "three Baghdad, Iraqi detention facilities" as part of the "reconstruction" of Iraq's criminal justice system.

Britain banned trade in such kit because irons can easily be used to torture or abuse prisoners by leaving them in tightened cuffs for long periods or by pulling on the chains. The United Nations' "standard minimum rules" for the treatment of prisoners also prohibit their use: UN investigators commonly find leg irons used for torture. However, they are legal and common in US jails.

The email passed to *Private Eye* included a discussion between Ali Aljanabi and Omar Al Obaidi, of the Al Salam and Al Ossol companies, and a US army buyer. The Iraqi businessmen asked: "Is it permissible to buy the items from countries such as China or Korea as long as the quality meets US standards?"

Quality was an issue, it seems. "We are having severe problems with those previously purchased," replied the officer, adding that only Smith & Wesson's "1900" leg irons with a 14-inch chain were acceptable.

The Iraqis also pointed out that "belly chains come with handcuffs. Is that in addition to the 5,000 handcuffs listed as a separate item?" The American reply was: "Yes, we still want the belly chains separate. They are required for different reasons." The reasons were not elaborated.

The Iraqi businessmen asked the US official to "please advise on style and finish of the desired items". While American officials gave clear instructions on the size, strength and make of the restraints, they were not bothered by aesthetics. "Doesn't matter, whatever you could get cheaper."

Private Eye asked the Foreign Office to comment, but it had not responded by the time we went to press.

HEALTH PRIVATISATION

Piqued district?

PATIENTS and campaigners have lost their battle to stop US private health giant United Healthcare from taking over two GP practices in Derbyshire (see *Eyes passim*).

While a high court judge ruled that the local North Eastern Derbyshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) had a duty to consult patients over changes in health policy such as privatisation, Mr Justice Collins decided that before going to court the patients should have gone to the trust's "patient forum" first.

The fact that pensioner Pam Smith, who brought the case on behalf of the patients, had never heard of her local patient forum (such forums are generally regarded as a dead loss and are in any event about to be abolished) cut no sway with the judge.

Though the judge's ruling is bad news for the people of Creswell and Langwith who wanted to stay with local NHS doctors but will now get United Health Europe's GP services, it is encouraging for other patients who might want to fight similar moves elsewhere.

In court, and contrary to the "patient-led NHS" mantra, lawyers acting for Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt and the PCT tried to reign in section 11 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001. This bit of the act stipulates that patients must be "involved in and consulted on" the planning, development and operation of health services. But Mr Justice Collins disagreed with their approach. "On the main issues she [Pam Smith] was successful, there was a failure to comply with section 11 in that there was no proper involvement or consultation with the public." he said.

The judge added: "I suppose the moral of this tale is that PCT should assume that section 11 applies… it will ensure the necessary patients involvement and will, it is hoped, avoid the real and understandable dismay at the way the PCT dealt with this situation. The decision may still be unpalatable but at least the public's view will have been taken into account."

Mr Justice Collins said there was no evidence that the tender process for the GP contracts was "other than fair". But GP Elizabeth Barratt, whose locally popular bid for the contract failed, could not of course compete with was the schmoozing done by United's European president, Simon Stevens. As a parliamentary question has just revealed, Stevens met Health Minister and former Accenture consultant Liam Byrne last July. And in October, the month before the contracts went out to tender, he attended a talk at the free market Adam Smith Institute, given by Lord Warner, another health minister.

As *Eye* readers well know, Stevens was a former health adviser to Tony Blair and the brains behind the market-driven NHS reforms – from which he now benefits to the tune of £150,000 a year.

ASBOS

Banana skin for Southwark

Good news for George Mothersole, 79, who is back at work at his son's fruit stall in London's East Street market after a judge eased the terms of an interim Asbo, imposed courtesy of Southwark council (Eye 1159).

Mr Mothersole, one of the oldest people ever to be subjected to an anti-social behaviour order, had been banned from both the market and meetings of market traders after the local authority complained that he was abusive and intimidating to council officers.

Fellow stallholders combined forces on his behalf and claimed that the long-time campaigner had been made the scapegoat for worsening relationships between stallholders and some council enforcement officers. The case is only part heard, but a district judge at Tower Bridge magistrates' court has said that the council had a high hurdle to overcome to take away both Mr Mothersole's democratic rights to attend the Town Hall, his trade union meetings and indeed the market where he worked.

He lifted those restrictions and left only the part of the interim Asbo which says Mr Mothersole must "not act in an intimidating manner towards to any person he knows to be a Council employee or Councillor". The hearing resumes in August.

CHARITY NEWS

False profits

JUST what does the Charity Commission do with the £30m-plus it receives each year from the government?

Presiding over a £39bn sector of 190,000 charities surely requires a strict watchdog to protect all those well-meant donations. Yet the saga of the commission's investigations into financial shenanigans at several London-based evangelical Christian churches suggests otherwise.

The investigation began in 2002 with the discovery of "possible misapplication of funds" at The King's Ministries, now Kingsway International Christian Centre, in Hackney. KICC claims to be the UK's largest independent church with a congregation of 12,000. Last year the commission concluded that founder and senior pastor, Matthew Ashimolowo (pictured below), had received unauthorised benefits including £120,000 spent on celebrating his birthday (of which £80,000 was spent on a new car), free accommodation and a timeshare apartment in Florida.

Ashimolowo claimed the apartment saved on hotel bills while spreading the word overseas and denounced the commission for misconstruing the church's upholding of biblical principles.

The commission ordered the creation of a new charity and board but astonishingly allowed Ashimolowo to stay on provided he pay back

£200,000, justifying this on the grounds that many of his congregation supported him and that to lose such a charismatic figure could jeopardise the church's future.

In 2004 the commission found evidence of "misconduct and mismanagement, including significant unauthorised salary payments" to Douglas Goodman, pastor at the Victory Christian Centre in Kilburn. However, by the time the investigation concluded, Goodman was already in jail for sexually assaulting church members and the commission decided that it would "not be a proportionate use of resources" to try to recover the money.

The commission also looked into Power Praise & Deliverance Ministries in North London, reporting last July that the pastor (he wasn't named) had increased his salary from £15,464 to £75,359 in 2001 despite spending half the year abroad while his congregation dwindled. Before registering as a charity the trustees had agreed to pay the pastor a similar level to a Church of England vicar, but instead the pastor operated a tithe system whereby worshippers paid a tenth of their income to the church, all of which went to him. The commission inquiry found weak management and criticised the trustees for meeting on an informal basis and failing to keep proper records. But once again it decided to let the pastor stay on, with new trustees, after he promised to spend more time in the UK.

Having taken so long to achieve so little, the commission published new guidance last month, setting out model trust deeds for independent churches. The guidance says spiritual leaders of evangelical churches who are also trustees should play no part in setting their own salaries. But guidance is not compulsory, and it still allows pastors to appoint the trustee board, rendering the exercise – almost four years of work and more than a million quid spent on investigations – little more than useless.

PFI

Flogging a dead horse

THE private finance initiative is in danger of turning into something resembling a stock market bubble as the government seeks to reassure an insatiable "market" that plenty more schemes are in the offing.

With PFI proving hugely expensive and inflexible (it has lumbered dozens of NHS trusts with unmanageable commitments) and almost impossible to operate (the schools PFI building programme is years behind schedule without a single deal signed), there were concerns in the business that the initiative might be scaled back. This could have spelt disaster as interest in the initiative relies on a market in PFI contracts under which developers flog their contracts to investors looking for government-backed income.

Thus at a PFI industry conference this month the Treasury's head of PFI, Richard Abadie, on secondment from PFI consultant PricewaterhouseCoopers, said that £4bn worth of deals would continue to flow every year for the next ten (slightly up on current levels) – dumping yet more unaffordable PFI contracts on to the taxpayer but keeping the all-important "market" satisfied.

Like all bubbles this one will burst, but when it does the taxpayer, not the companies, will be left to pick up the tab. When public spending stops rising as it has in recent years, the PFI industry's bills, stretching ahead for decades, will still be the first to be paid. The damage already caused to public services by PFI will pale in comparison.

Meanwhile another former PwC man at the heart of government has seen his contribution to the PFI industry properly recognised. Nick Prior, head of the Ministry of Defence's private finance unit, was last month presented with the "individual contribution" prize at the Public Private Finance awards by William Hague. Prior's towering achievement following his arrival from PwC in 2005 was to produce a report declaring the success of PFI in defence projects, despite admissions from the minister who had launched the review, Lord Bach, that defence PFI deals had not gone well. Several lucrative contracts are now safe – not least the £19bn defence training deal on which the MoD's adviser is… PwC.

Oddly the winner in the "best financial adviser" category was also PwC. In the words of the judges: "…whatever the deal, there's one name that seems ubiquitous: PwC" and "PwC really dominates large deals. It's been everywhere and done everything."

One thing it did was produce a report five years ago purporting to show that PFI offered value for money, on the back of which the government has for years justified pumping billions into the scheme – to the great enrichment of the likes of PwC.

COMPENSATION

Miners shafted

FORMER miners who believe they were let down by those handling a £7bn compensation scheme – the biggest ever for industry-related disease – really have been let down this time.

Sixty-four former mine workers, supported by the Action Group for Miners, now face a potential legal bill of £1.2m after a high court judge accused their new City solicitors of launching a "misconceived" action that was "doomed from the start".

In an unprecedented attack, Sir Michael Turner said Greene Wood and McLean's attempt to launch a group litigation action against the Union of Democratic Miners (UDM), claims handler Vendside and five other firms of solicitors was "inept" and "unnecessary" and a "gross abuse of the system". He said any action should have been against the union or its handlers, not the solicitors.

Sir Michael highlighted multiple inaccuracies and said there was a gross imbalance between the legal costs incurred and the amount the miners were likely to recover – around £350 per man.

The proceedings sprang from concerns over whether fixed fees of an average of £350 deducted from successful claimants, either by the union or by lawyers acting on its behalf, were legal. Although the legal and administrative costs of successful claims under the scheme are paid by the Department of Trade, it has long been the case in union supported litigation that it also takes a fixed fee from successful claims to off-set the costs of unsuccessful claims. This has led to widespread allegations of "double-charging" for the successful claims and an investigation by the Serious Fraud Office into the UDM and Vendside is continuing.

The Bassetlaw MP John Mann believes miners should not have had fees deducted. But the judge said that much of the publicity put out by or for the Action Group for Miners had been "misleading" and the decision to try to bring about a group action was "heavy handed and aggressive". All it had achieved, he said, was more legal costs and much delay. "For this, a heavy burden of responsibility lies on the legal advisers."

While the judge made an order for costs against the 64 miners, neither the union nor the five solicitors' firms are expected to enforce it. They are much more likely to seek a "wasted costs order against the law firm" [Greene Wood and McLean].

POLICE 5

Rank failure

WHEN the Crown Prosecution Service decided earlier this year that no criminal charges would be brought against Greater Manchester police officers in two botched murder investigations – including that of serial killer Harold Shipman – it was expected that the officers involved would at least face disciplinary action. But no.

The harshest sanction the Independent Police Complaints Commission has come up with after nearly three years is to give "words of advice" – ie a ticking-off – to one officer, Detective Inspector David Smith, for "incompetence in handling some important intelligence" in the trial of seven men wrongly accused of the murder of drug dealer David Barnshaw.

Three other officers escaped censure entirely; and as *Eye* readers already know, the man who led the inquiry, Det Chief Inspector Kenny "non stick" Caldwell, was allowed to retire during the investigation.

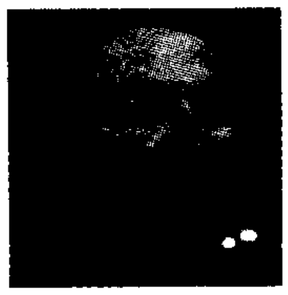
This is a little surprising given that when the Barnshaw murder trial collapsed in 2003, the judge said Caldwell was guilty of "extremely serious, deliberate and dishonest conduct" in concealing crucial documents that pointed to suspects other than the seven who stood in the dock. In addition, Smith was accused of not telling the truth about an informer. The judge said the police failings were so serious he was referring the matter to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

But no prosecution followed; and earlier this month the IPCC said that while the officers made errors, they amounted to "incompetence, rather than deliberate attempts to pervert the course of justice".

Separately, Smith didn't even get a ticking off for his role in the Shipman inquiry, even though Dame Janet Smith who headed it said the lives of three patients could have been saved but for the botched police investigation. Smith, the man in charge, was "out of his depth". He played down the seriousness of the initial allegations about Shipman, then lied to deflect criticism, she said.

The IPCC investigation report merely concluded that "there was some evidence of breaches relating to honesty, integrity and performance of duties" by DI Smith. However, partly because of a reluctance of some witnesses to appear at a disciplinary hearing, the IPCC did not feel it had enough evidence to prove any misconduct.

Smith, who has been on gardening leave and full pay, was reinstated. Like his superior Caldwell, he is expected to retire on full pension.



ISRAEL

No entry sign

Complaints have been made to the Israeli ambassador about the treatment of a London human rights lawyer who was detained by Israel security officials when she arrived in Tel-Aviv to speak at an international legal conference.

Kate Maynard had already been questioned by Israeli officials at Heathrow before she set out for the conference on "The role of Human Rights lawyers in Israel and the Palestinian Territories" organized by Avocats Sans Frontières (ASF). But when Ms Maynard, who had also been due to meet and carry out some legal work for Palestinian clients landed at Ben Gurion airport, she was detained, questioned and ordered to be deported.

With the help of ASF and a local Israeli lawyer, and after being detained overnight, she applied to the high court in Tel Aviv to quash the decision refusing to allow her to enter Israel. Judge Tal initially ordered that she be allowed to enter Israel for the conference only. However, the Israeli authorities contacted the judge and he changed the order to a recommendation, which, for reasons of "security", they decided to ignore.

Ms Maynard was, of course, one of two British lawyers who obtained an arrest warrant for war crimes against former Israeli commander Major General Doron Almog (pictured), over mass house demolitions in the Gaza Strip (Eye 1148). Almog is believed to have avoided arrest by Scotland Yard officers when he flew into Heathrow thanks to the police failing to board the plane, and a tip-off which meant that he stayed on plane and escaped back to Israel. The only questions Ms Maynard was asked were in relation to the Almog case and the collection of "evidence against other high-ranking Israeli officials".

Islington South MP Emily Thornberry, in whose constituency Ms Maynard's law firm is, has raised the issue with both the Foreign Office and the Israeli ambassador, Zvi Heifetz. So far there has been no response from the embassy. Foreign Office minister Kim Howells said in answer to a parliamentary question: "Decisions on who can enter Israel are for the government of Israel, but we try to ensure that all British citizens are treated appropriately."

In the wake of Israeli and American anger over the Almog affair, the British government said it was considering changing the law to ensure that only its law officers could ever seek an arrest warrant for foreign military or government personnel. So there is little chance that ministers will be rocking any diplomatic boats on behalf of Ms Maynard or her human rights colleagues.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THAT much-misunderstood lawyer David Mills is fighting hard to convince a Milan judge that he was lying when he confessed to the Italian investigating magistrates as well as the Inland Revenue and his accountants that he had been bribed by Silvio Berlusconi not to tell the full story at two criminal trials.

Now the confidant, as Mr Tessa Jowell, of Labour government insiders insists that he is telling the truth – that the money came from another client, Diego Atanasio. Atanasio says Mills is lying and that anyway he was in prison when he is supposed to have paid the money to Mills.

Mills' initial statement has severely embarrassed Berlusconi and the former prime minister now faces the prospect of yet another trial – this time for corruption with Mills as a co-defendant. With Berlusconi no longer in power, that could be possible despite the lack of any evidence incriminating the politician other than Mills' retracted confessions. But the good news for both is that any conviction or even a trial could be time barred unless charges and trial follow at a speed unknown in Italian courts.

This may not be the first time Berlusconi has had reason to be unhappy with Mills. Back in 1990, it is suggested, the lawyer was involved in a puzzling deal in which Berlusconi's Fininvest group put £7.35m into the financial services group run by the infamous Roger Levitt. Fininvest, along with insurers General Accident and Commercial Union, each paid that amount for a 4.9 percent stake in Levitt Group.

Within months Levitt Group had collapsed, Levitt was bankrupt and facing fraud charges. He later pleaded guilty in return for that notorious community service sentence.

Not suprisingly Fininvest and the two insurers were more than a little unhappy with Chase Manhattan over the prospectus provided by the bankers upon which they had invested. There was talk of legal action. No doubt Fininvest, whose UK and offshore companies were run by Mills, could have relied on his advice for dealing with this problem.

LAST July investors in Equator Exploration were reminded (*Eye* 1136) of what happened the last time its Canadian chief executive Wade Cherwayko claimed to have found oil in the Niger delta. Shares in Abacan Resources soared to Can$15 in 1997 only to crash below $1 in 1998 – at which point "Prince Wade" left – after Abacan admitted its oil find was nothing like as promising as he had made out.

Equator, which raised £60m in 2004 at the time it listed on AIM, attracted another £144m from new investors in March this year largely on its Niger delta prospects. This financing valued Equator at more than £600m, making it one of the biggest AIM companies.

However, last month "Prince Wade" had to announce that drilling at its much touted Owanare 1 prospect had been "disappointing". The shares halved in a week, hitting 86p compared to the 350p paid in March. They have since climbed back to around 112p.

Cherwayko says Equator will still hit it big but this looks increasingly like a rerun of Abacan. Something that must concern non-executive director and former Tory minister for Africa, Baroness Chalker.

"I don't want to spoil your weekend, Simpkins – so I'll leave what I'm going to say until Monday"

FUGITIVE Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky enjoyed mixed fortunes last month.

While on a visit to Brazil – where he is mooted to have interests in a soccer club and in rescuing the bankrupt Varig airline – he was detained and questioned by police in Sao Paulo for several hours. Berezovsky put this down to his enemies in the Kremlin who persist in efforts to have him extradited from his home in Britain on various tax and other charges.

But despite this inconvenience, later in May Berezovsky was successful in a libel action brought in London against his fellow oligarch and Putin ally, Mikhail Fridman. Berezovsky sued over comments made by the Alfa Group boss about his business techniques on a Russian TV programme. Berezovsky was awarded £50,000 damages and costs estimated at up to £750,000.

Just why the UK taxpayer – who in part covers the costs of the high court holding such trials – should pick up the tab for a two-week trial involving a row between two rich Russians over a programme seen by probably a minimal audience in Britain (other rich Russians with satellite TVs or those in hotels) is perhaps a question for the trial judge, Mr Justice Eady, or the Lord Chancellor, Lord Falconer.

DESPITE being unwanted in the Malaysian courts, Cherie Blair QC can still look forward to a big earner arguing the legitimacy of decisions on property rights made by the Turkish Cypriot government of Northern Cyprus which HMG (prop: Tony Blair) does not recognise.

Cherie B is acting for a British family whose home in Northern Cyprus is claimed by a Greek Cypriot and who is seeking to enforce a Cypriot court judgment in the UK under EU rules. The case is being in part financed by developers in Northern Cyprus who are eager to encourage more foreign home buyers.

Britain is even keener to see Cyprus united – if only because it is a condition of Turkey joining the EU, very much a Blair project. But the Turkish Cypriots persist in providing ammunition to those Greek Cypriots who reject the current UN proposed deal for unification by giving refuge to wanted British criminals.

Gary Robb, who fled Britain while awaiting a 1997 trial for drug trafficking charges, made a new career in Northern Cyprus as a property developer. Large amounts of drug money have been washed through Northern Cyprus by Turkish heroin barons, in particular via property development.

Robb suddenly disappeared last October to Thailand after transferring several million pounds. His company, AGA Development, ceased operations leaving a trail of angry foreigner home buyers who had paid deposits.

Last month Robb suddenly reappeared in Northern Cyprus claiming to be the victim of a Greek Cypriot plot and maintaining there was no warrant for his arrest. His evidence – the fact that the British high commission in Nicosia had renewed his passport in 2001. He also promises that the AGA homes will be built.

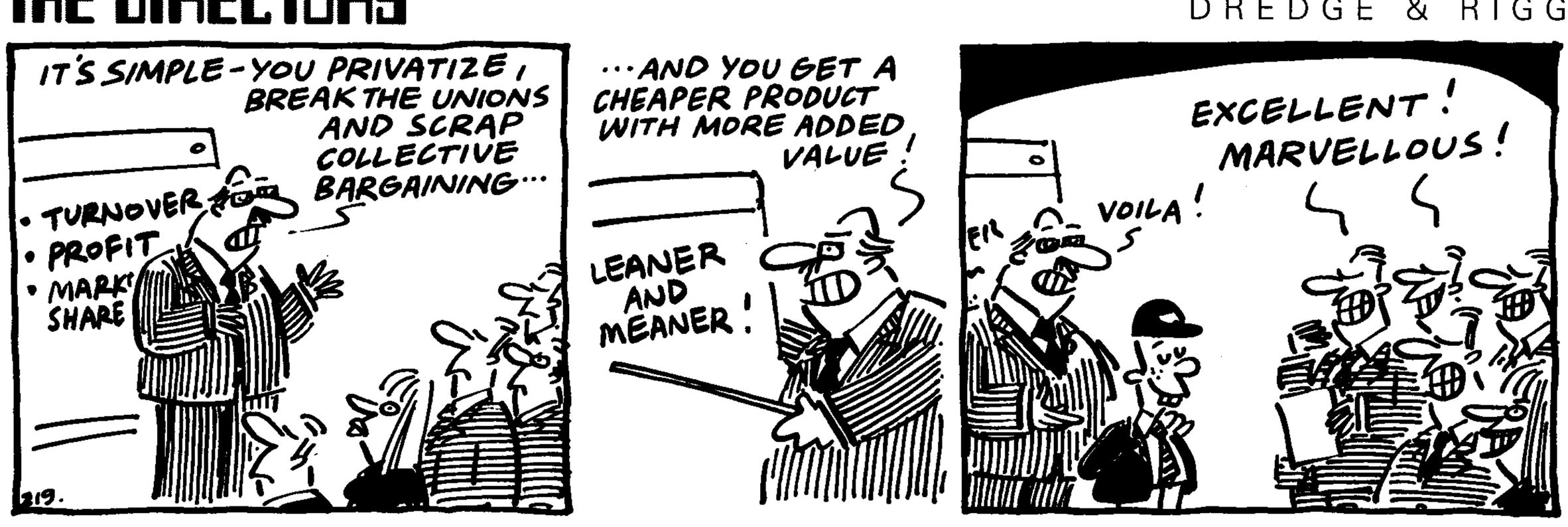
Cleveland police dispute the Robb version and say he is still wanted and will be arrested if he returns to Britain. However, the Turkish Cypriot authorities appear to have no plan to arrest Robb or hand him over any day soon. What will happen if a UK request is made for Robb remains to be seen. Although there is no extradition agreement with Northern Cyprus, as Britain does not recognise it, there has been unofficial police cooperation in the past on wanted criminals and Northern Cyprus is to try a Turkish Cypriot wanted in Britain.

Just how Cherie Blair will square this diplomatic circle when it comes to upholding decisions made by a regime the other half of the Blair household does not recognise as legal and which shelters British drug barons, remains to be seen.

AIM-listed Erinaceous Group may face another problem in addition to the Serious Farce Office investigation into false over-valuations on commercial properties provided to several lenders by the City office of its Dunlop Haywards subsidiary.

Another subsidiary, auctioneer Harman Henry, conducted sales over more than 10 commercial properties on the back of leases with covenants provided or guaranteed by the Southern Cross Group which collapsed last year. The buyers for the commercial properties paid more than £20m. But with Southern Cross gone south the values – largely dependant on the Southern Cross guarantees – are highly questionable.

Harman Henry claimed that Southern Cross was good for the guarantees because the offshore-



owned company (no relation to the care home operator of the same name) had assets on its balance sheet worth more than £50m. However, this has turned out to be a work of fiction, there is now an investigation by the Department of Timidity & Inaction into Southern Cross.

The man behind the company – although he strenuously denies it – is "Lord" Edward Davenport who is the focus of the DTI investigation along with his associates. This saw some 12 Metropolitan police officers raid his 24-room London home in Portland Place close to the BBC last March.

Davenport acquired the lease on the dilapidated former Sierra Leone high commission in 1999 for a reputed £50,000 in disputed circumstances while the West African state was wracked by civil war. Late last year the freehold was acquired by an offshore company based on the Caribbean island of Nevis, a favourite for Davenport-linked companies. The lease had previously been transferred by the Howard de Walden estate to another Nevis company for £3.75m. The deal was financed by HSBC in Monaco where Davenport claims to be resident. The property is now said to be on the market at more than £5m.

Neighbours in Weymouth Mews at the rear of the Portland Place property are hoping the sale goes through soon. An address in the mews which was part of the high commission deal and shared the same ownership has been the subject of complaints because of the large numbers of male visitors late at night seven days a week.

Doubtless "Lord" Davenport – he bought the title – was totally unaware of such anti-social nocturnal activities and would most certainly not approve.

SLICKER TOLD YOU SO

EIGHTEEN months ago the *Eye* questioned the accounts of iSoft, the main software supplier to the multi-billion pound NHS National Programme for IT (NPfIT).

"Is there a possibility that revenue is being recognised too soon, taking too little or no account for future problems which so often beset ambitious IT projects in Britain?" this column wondered in issue 1121. Several predictable set-backs and three profit warnings later, the answer is emphatically "yes".

In the past fortnight iSoft has been forced to re-write its accounts, wiping out £165m – or all of its past profits. The practice of booking income years before the money was due to be received was indeed wildly optimistic. Chief executive Tim Whiston has resigned, but isn't too ashamed to take a £550,000 pay-off.

At this stage there's nothing to suggest that Whiston and colleagues behaved improperly in signing off the Alice in Wonderland accounts, approved by the then auditors Robson Rhodes, but the restatements do show that iSoft wasn't making the profits it claimed. And it was on the back of these illusory profits that the directors trousered huge bonuses and made enormous gains on share sales at prices inflated by the dodgy figures. Chairman Patrick Cryne and commercial director Steve Graham made almost £40m between them during 2004 and 2005, while Whiston sold shares for more than £5m at around 400p each. They are now valued at less than 60p. And that's without the hundreds of thousands in "performance" bonuses to go on top of their ample salaries. All of which is a bit embarrassing for the man who sat on the iSoft remuneration and audit committees that oversaw it all: one Sir Digby Jones, outgoing CBI director-general and soon to be Deloitte partner.

Many are now wondering who's next. The National Audit Office last week pointed out that the lengthy delays in the NPfIT are being paid for by the companies given the contracts. Of these only Accenture has admitted to losing money; others insist their finances are fine despite all the problems. That's what iSoft said last year.

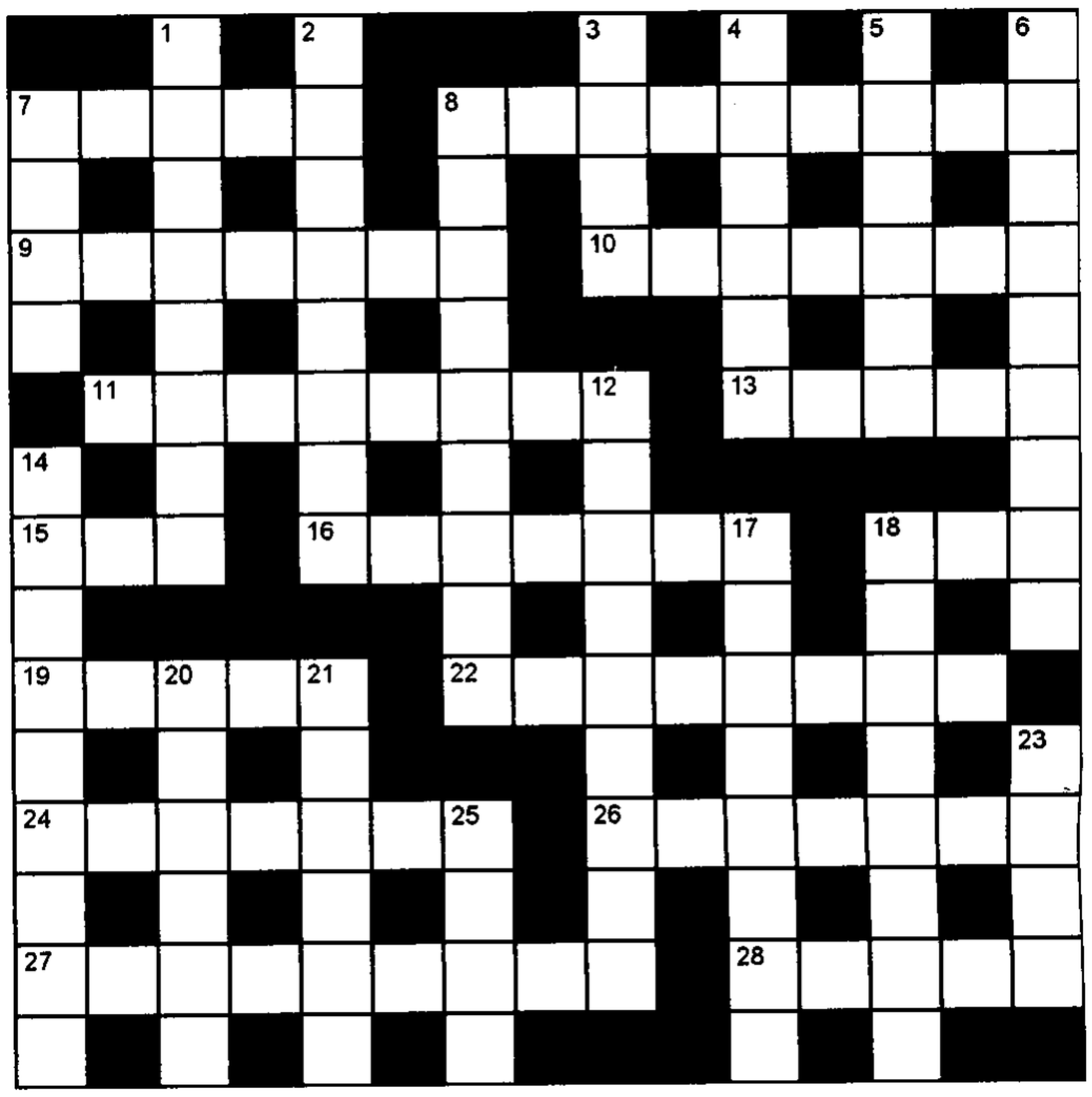
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 316

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 30 June 2006

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

7 Some swear by one that's firm without looking inflamed (5)

8 Latest exposure of member's an intrusion on the viewer (9)

9/10/3 Achieving your death? One method is shagging (7,4,3,4)

11 Penis ring swallowed by one-time love bird (8)

13 Current outspoken Shah (5)

15 See 26ac.

16 Administer a handjob, say (and go through the experience again without energy)? (7)

18/25 Definitive smack dose (3,4)

19 Ex-editor's wrinkly organ (5)

22 Perform oral sex, getting stiff at first, which is a big setback (4,4)

24 It's flipping Brown in charge – what a disaster! (7)

26/15 Had droopy tits, enveloping Leo's head – distasteful, so heavily criticized (7,3)

27 Brandished when spelling out "Adam Wing" with cold heart? (5,4)

28 How the missionary gets his oats over? (2,3)

DOWN

1 Heavy rock star minced and moulded this (4,4)

2 Handle Lewinksy's first broadcast (8)

3 See 9ac.

4 Pour forth and f— enjoy! (6)

5 Queer object, a butt (3,3)

6 Shook the woman no end, like a cow (9)

7 Pound Cameron's head to get on (4)

8 Titled bloke, going topless, gets "wood" in place of entertainment (9)

12 Rev. does fuss about party – let the dope get out of control (9)

14 Mostly worried about nothing following business procedure to divert motions (9)

17 Am screwing around with benzol – decorate my arms! (8)

18 Notwithstanding empty Tories' ideas (8)

20 Party leader missing from podium due to senility (6)

21 Ineffectual type, but he's no plonker (6)

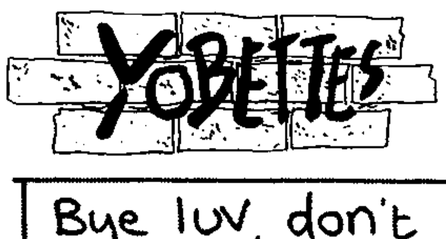
23 Prince seen after wild LSD party (4)

25 See 18ac.

Crossword 315 winner: MRS E.C. BARKER

ACROSS: 7 In cahoots 9 Agnes 11 Linctus 12 In power 13 Chat show host 16 Equerry 17 Anguish 19/25 Premenstrual tension 24 Imbiber 26 Euros 27 Twin-screw.

DOWN: 1/22 Billy Liar 2 Thatcher 3 Corsetry 4 Isaiah 5 Pawpaw 6 Snowdonia 8 Cane 10 Scratchy 14 Helpline 15 Nuremberg 17 Airstrip 18 Glasnost 20 Emboss 21 Sprats 23 Snowy.



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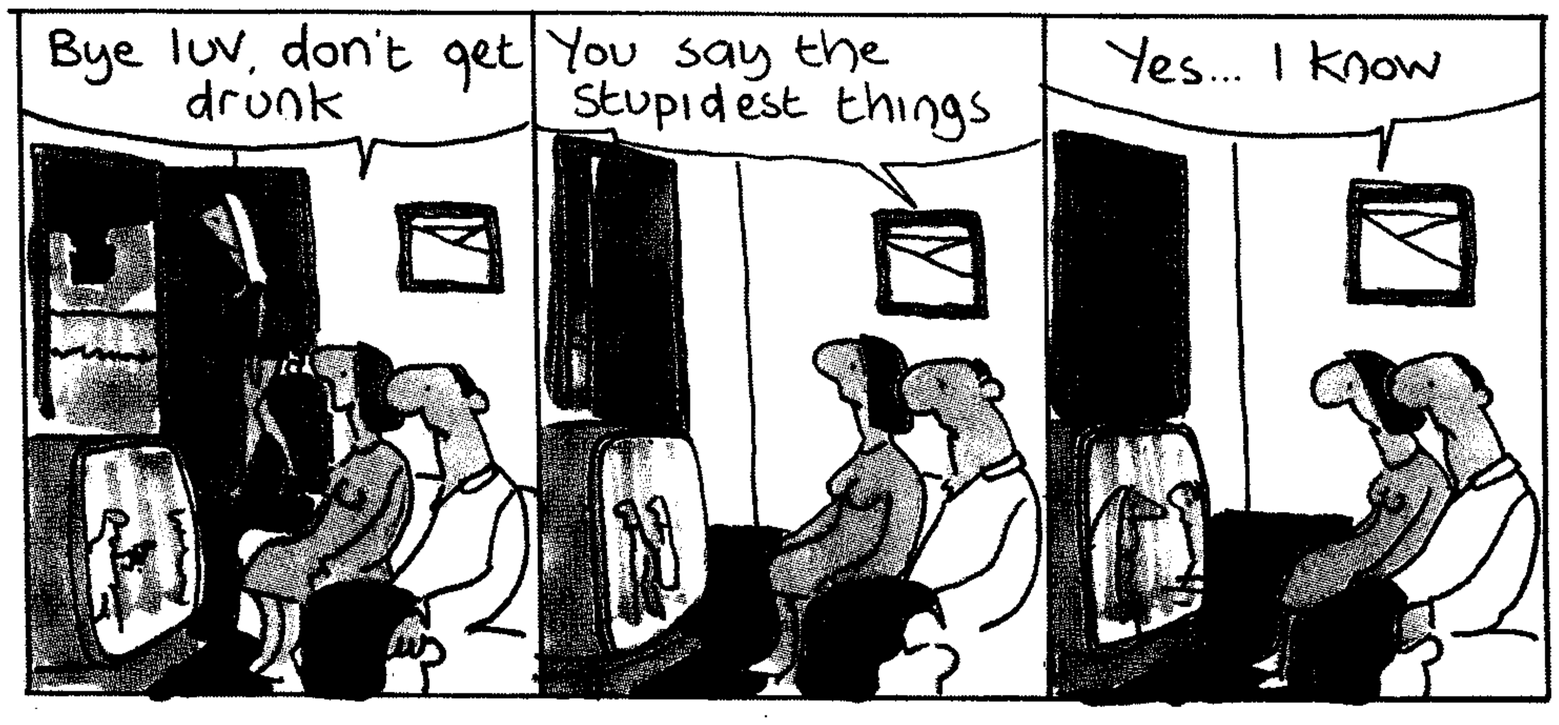

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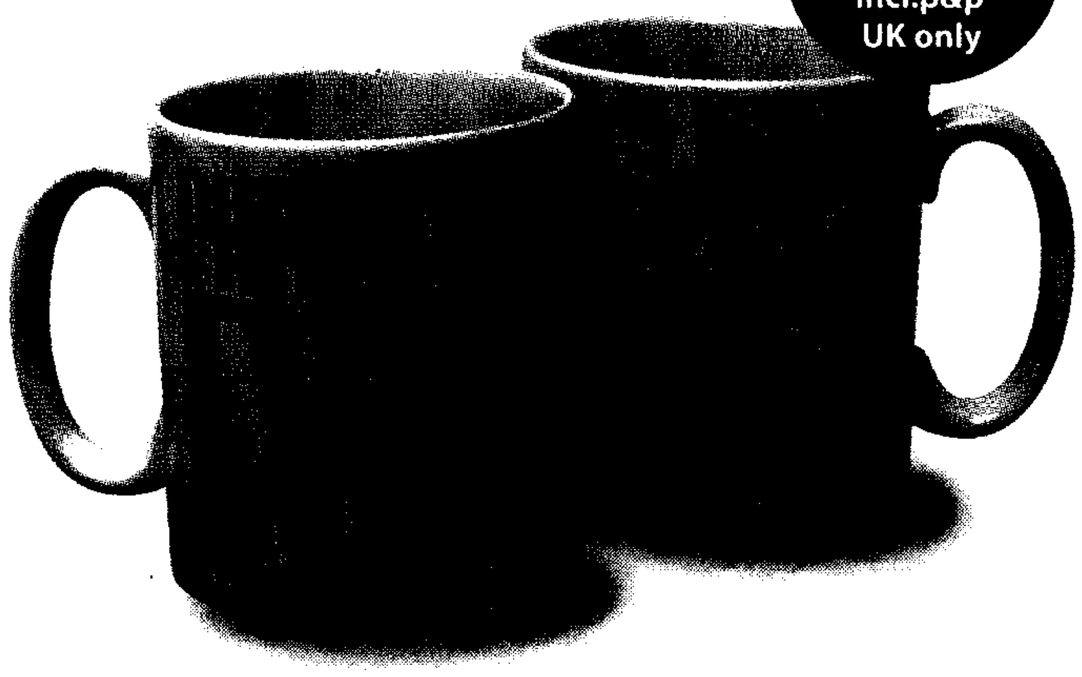

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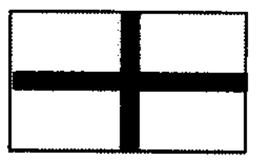

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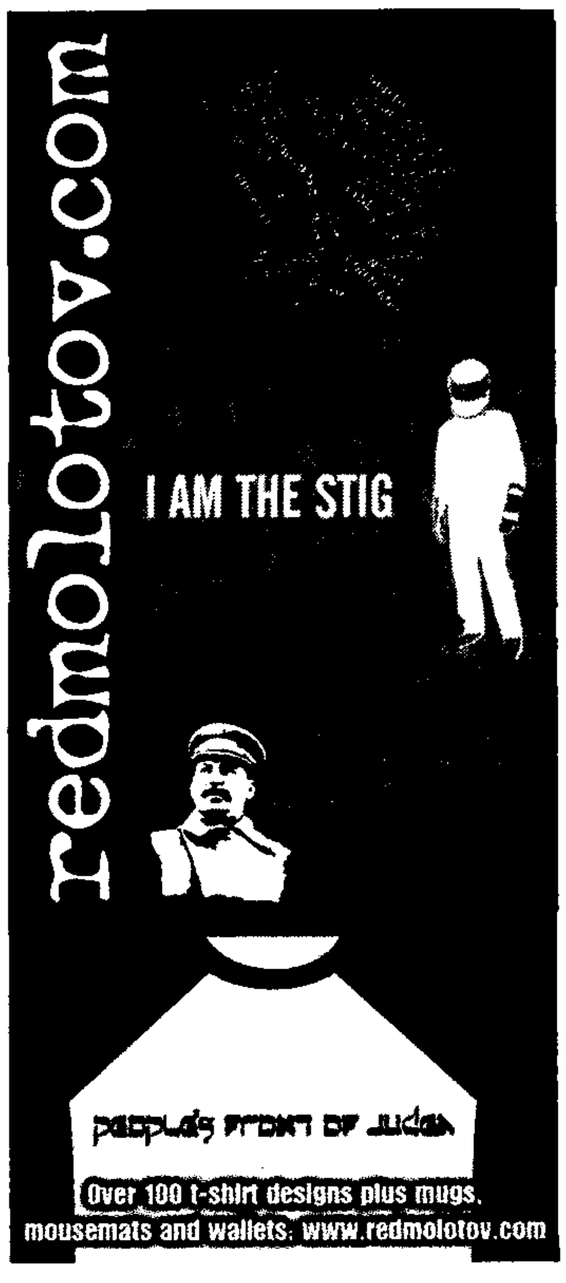

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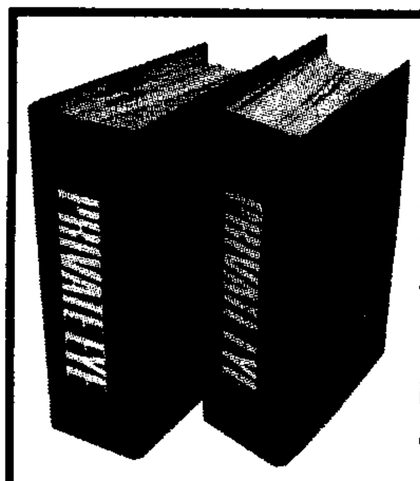

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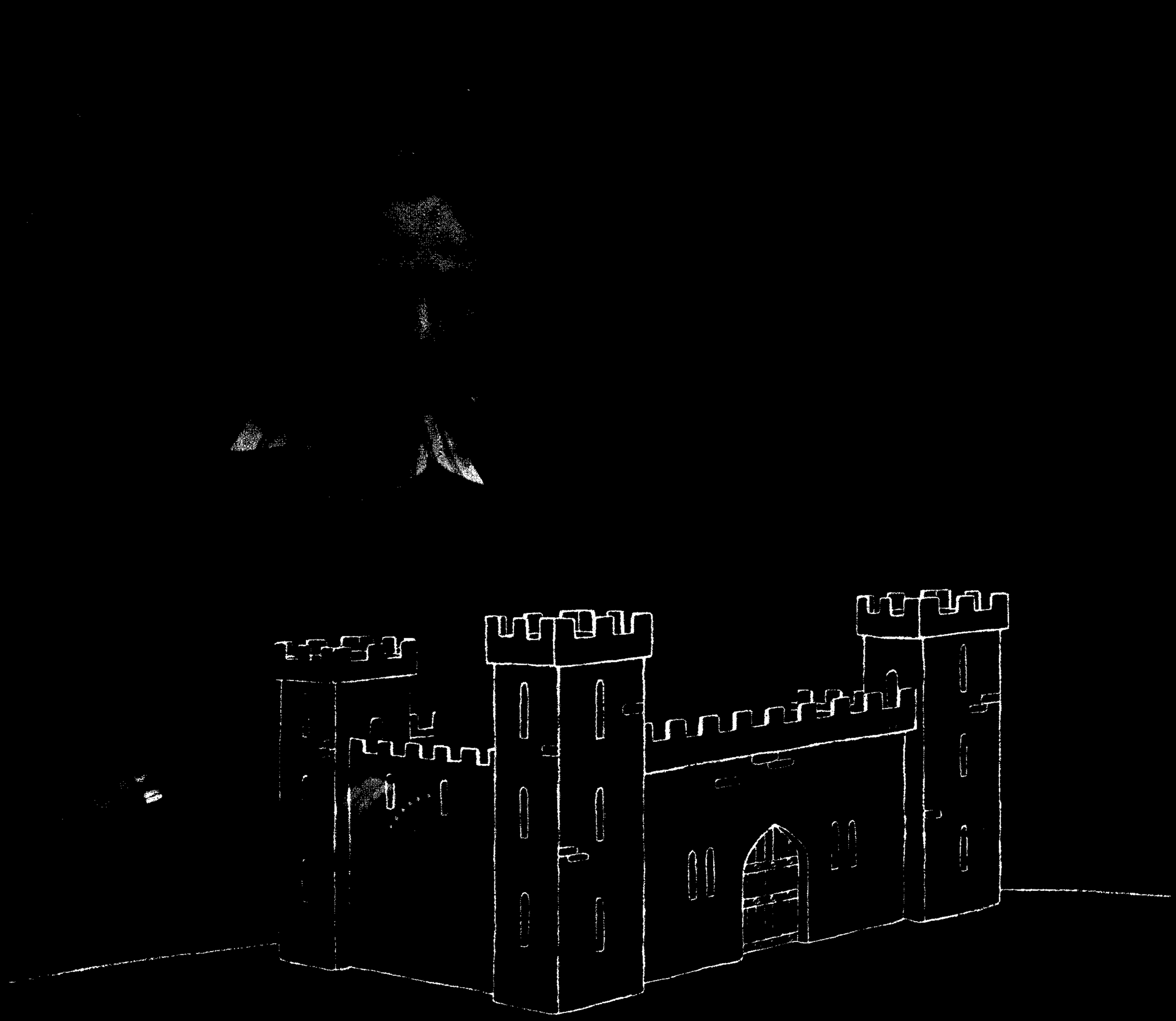

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